OVERLORD [3] The bloody valkyrie Kugane Maruyama
illustration by so-bin

# オーバーロード 3 鮮血の戦乙女

丸山くがね

# Overlord Volume 3 Chapter 1

## Herd of Predators

OVERLORD 「3」 The bloody valkyrie
1章 捕食者の群れ

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### Part 1

“What kind of food is this?!”
A shrill, nigh-hysterical voice cut through the air, and then the sound of crashing cutlery echoed through the dining room.
Several people turned to look at the girl who was kicking up a fuss.

The girl was so beautiful that using the word to describe her seemed inadequate. Her looks could rival those of the Kingdom’s most beautiful woman — the one with the appellation of “Golden” — and her anger only added to her charm.
In addition, every move she made was elegant and refined, even while throwing a tantrum.

She must have been nobility in some country, the heiress to a highborn family. She flicked at her long French curls in annoyance, and glared at the food before her in dissatisfaction.

All manner of dishes packed the table before her.

There were freshly-baked loaves of bread, still steaming in their basket. The plates were laden with thick, rare cuts of juicy red meat, served with sweetcorn and buttered mashed potatoes. The sight of them stimulated the appetite. The fresh vegetables which made up the salad were still crisp and soft, and their fragrant dressing filled the room with a citrus scent.

The highest-class inn in E-Rantel — the Shining Golden Pavilion — used [Preservation] magic to keep their ingredients fresh. Naturally, only the finest of chefs were allowed to turn said ingredients into meals.

However, despite the best efforts of the most skilled chefs that used the finest ingredients to produce culinary works of art — which only nobility, royalty or the wealthiest of merchants would be privileged enough to taste — the girl turned her nose up at the plates before her.

It was only natural to feel shocked by her complaint, but beyond that, the people who heard her also felt curiosity about what she normally ate.

“It tastes horrible!”

The words she uttered after that were singularly inappropriate to this place, and they left everyone in the room speechless.

However, the old butler behind the girl kept his expression neutral and did not change his stance Even when the girl turned and glared at him, he remained unmoved, as though he could not make any other facial expressions.

“Ahhhh, I can’t bear to stay in this run-down city any further! We’re setting out now!”

“But Young Mistress, it’s already evening—”

“Silence! I said we’re going, so we’re going, do you understand me?!”

Only after hearing the girl’s childish tantrum did the butler’s posture change. He lowered his head and replied:

“Understood, Young Mistress. I shall begin travel preparations immediately.”

“Hmph! If you understand, then hurry up and get ready, Sebas!”

The girl tossed away the fork she was holding and rose to her feet, before flouncing out of the dining room. She was still fuming as she did so.

After the storm had passed, a solemn, dignified voice lightened the heavy mood in the room:

“I apologize to everyone for the disturbance.”

The butler picked up the chair which the girl had knocked over and replaced it, then bowed deeply to everyone in the dining room as a sign of contrition. Quite a few of them accepted the old man’s immaculate apology with pitying eyes.

“—Innkeeper.”

“Yes.”

A man who had been waiting in the wings approached the butler.

“Once again, I apologize for startling everyone. Though I know it will not excuse this offense, I hope you will allow me to pay for the meals of everyone here.”

Looks of delight bloomed on the faces of several of the diners as they heard those words. A meal in a first-rate inn like this would certainly not be cheap. If this old man was willing to pay for their food, that would be a good enough reason to forgive that girl.

On the other hand, the innkeeper’s face remained impassive as he bowed politely in response to the butler’s proposal. That natural reaction of his was proof that scenes like this had been seen many times, ever since this pair of master and servant had taken up lodgings at the Shining Golden Pavilion.

Sebas looked toward a corner of the dining hall, at a destitute-looking man shoveling food into his mouth. As the man noticed Sebas’ eyes on him, he rose to his feet and quickly walked towards Sebas.

Compared to the other guests, the man seemed completely out of place. He lacked both style and class, and so he stood out from everyone around him.

Although his clothes were no shabbier than those of the people nearby, they did not go well on him. In fact, it was quite comical — like a clown in fancy dress.

“Master Sebas.”

“What is it, Zack-san?”

The other guests frowned as they heard the smarmy tones in which Zack spoke. The way he wrung his hands went very well with the way he was toadying up to Sebas.

However, Sebas’ expression remained unchanged.

“As a hired man, I have no room to propose an alternative… but would it not be better to reconsider the decision to set off immediately?”

“Are you saying you have difficulty driving a wagon at night?”

“That is one of the reasons, and… I have some… other business to take care of.”

Zack scratched his head over and over again. Though his hair looked clean enough, the way he was scratching made it seem like he was going to start throwing off flakes of skin. Quite a few peoples’ frowns deepened further. However, whether he had noticed or not, he ended up scratching even harder.

“However, the Young Mistress will most likely not accept that suggestion. Or rather, given the Young Mistress’ personality, she will not change her earlier decision.”

With a steely, unyielding look on his face, Sebas concluded:

“Therefore, we have no choice but to set out.”

“But…”

Zack’s eyes darted around, looking for some other excuse to give. However, he found none, and he grimaced.

“Of course, we will not be leaving right away. We will need some time to load the Young Mistress’ luggage onto the wagon. During that time, please prepare for our departure.”

Sebas noted the wily gleam in the eyes of the improverished-looking man before him as he scrabbled for something to say. However, Sebas did not show any signs that he cared.

This was all to cover up the fact that all was going as planned.

“Then, when will we be leaving?”

“How about two, maybe three hours later? If we leave later than that, the streets will be shrouded in darkness. That is probably the limit.”

That disgusting, calculative look appeared in the man’s eyes again. Sebas once again pretended that he had not noticed it. After licking his lips several times, Zack replied:

“Hehe, that should be fine.”

“Excellent. Then, can I ask you to begin preparing right away?”

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As he watched Zack’s retreating figure, Sebas waved his hand, as though to clear the air around him. It seemed polluted somehow, and it clung to him.

Sebas — his face a mask of neutrality — fought the urge to sigh.

Frankly speaking, Sebas had no love for such despicable characters. Perhaps his colleagues Demiurge and Shalltear could derive some minor amusement from these people by treating them like toys, but Sebas did not want to let people like that near himself.

There were some shared opinions in the Great Tomb of Nazarick, such as “Everything which does not belong to Nazarick is an inferior lifeform” and “Other than a rare few exceptions, humans and demihumans are weaklings that must be trampled”. Sebas operated by his creator’s credo that “those who do not save the weak cannot call themselves strong”, and thus he had his doubts about those opinions. However, he began to feel that there might be some truth to them when he met wretched individuals like Zack.

“Good grief. Humans should be an outstanding species…”

After raising his hand to stroke his neatly-trimmed moustache, he turned his thoughts to what he should do next.

The plan was going quite well. However, he still needed to confirm the details with his observer.

Just as Sebas was thinking about the direction in which he would proceed, he noticed a man approaching him.

“It must be quite hard on you to have to set out at this time.”

The person addressing him was a clean-shaven man in his late 40s. His black hair was streaked with white, and due to age and heavy meals, his pot belly was soft and rounded.

He was tastefully-dressed, in clothes that both reflected his high station and his sense of style.

“Bardo-san, I presume?”

Sebas dipped his head in acknowledgement. The man (Bardo) extended a hand to stop him.

“Ah, no, no, there’s no need for such formality.”

The man called Bardo Lofley was a merchant, who controlled a large portion of the grain trade in this city. For some reason, he had come over and begun speaking to Sebas.

The Fortress City was a strategic location in war. Bardo was heavily involved in the food trade here, which made him quite a big figure among the city’s many merchants.

Once one had a fighting force of over 10’000 men, feeding them became a task which consumed great amounts of time and manpower. Therefore, the Kingdom’s policy on that matter was to march their troops to this city with minimum rations, whereupon they would resupply upon arrival. Therefore, merchants who dealt in food and weapons were quite influential in this place, unlike regular cities.

Anyone in E-Rantel with such power would never chat up someone else simply because they were eating in the same restaurant. Therefore, he must have had some motive for reaching out to Sebas.

Still, Sebas had been expecting this.

“Sebas-san, that person’s not a good sort.”

“Is he?”

Sebas’ expression changed for the first time as he smiled while answering courteously. His response implied that he knew exactly who Bardo was referring to.

“He’s not a trustworthy fellow. I have no idea why you would employ someone like him, Sebas-san.”

Sebas thought quickly, looking for the answer which was most appropriate to the present circumstances.

He could not tell the other man the true reasons behind hiring Zack. However, if he said that he had hired Zack because he was a nobody, Sebas would look bad in the eyes of others and their opinions of him would suffer.

Although they had decided to leave this city, he wanted to avoid Bardo thinking poorly of him. In the future, they might need to make use of the man.

“That might be correct, but nobody has sold himself the way he does. Granted, his personality is flawed, but the Young Mistress appreciates his passion.”

Bardo smiled uncomfortably, and his opinion of the young mistress in question fell by another notch.

She was there for precisely that purpose, so it could not be helped, but Sebas still found it difficult have her take the blame for this.

“I fear I have gone too far. I hope you will remove those words from your memory; though I would still suggest that you try to persuade your mistress otherwise.”

“There might be merit in your words. However, when I think of the Young Mistress’ father; that is to say, the kindness that he showed me, I simply cannot…”

“Of course, loyalty is important…”

Bardo’s voice trailed off, and the rest was unintelligible.

“In that case, would you like me to send a few reliable men along with you?”

“There is no need for you to go to such lengths for us.”

Those words may have been spoken with kindness and warmth, but they were an ironclad denial. Perhaps Bardo sensed the firm determination hidden within that reply, which was why he decided to try a different angle of approach.

“Is that so? I personally feel it would be better to be escorted by competent bodyguards. The way to the Royal Capital is long, and unlike the Empire, the roads of the Kingdom are not very safe. I could recommend some reliable mercenaries.”

The security of the roads in the Kingdom fell to the nobles who owned the land through which those roads passed. In turn, they would collect a toll from travellers. This was the privilege of the nobles, but in truth, it was little more than a means of collecting a road tax, and the security of the roads was riddled through with holes in many places. It was quite common for travellers to meet brigands or sellswords who had turned to banditry while on the road.

In an effort to solve this problem, the “Golden Princess” had worked hard to have the roads patrolled by guardsmen loyal to the Crown. However, there were far too few of these patrolmen for the plan to have any effect. In addition, the nobles were worried that their privileges would be infringed upon, and worked to get in the patrolmen’s way.

In the end, the situation was one where the country could not ensure the safety of its own roads.

Therefore, travelling merchants typically hired adventurers or a band of trusted mercenaries to defend themselves. A powerful and prestigious person like Bardo would surely know of well-trained and reliable mercenaries. However, Sebas could not accept his offer.

“Indeed, you might be right to say so. However, the Young Mistress does not like having people by her side, and so I am bound to comply with her requests as much as possible.”

“Is that so.”

Bardo was now frowning in an exaggerated manner, a troubled expression on his face. This was how an adult would react in the face of a child throwing a tantrum.

“I apologize for having to reject your kindness.”

“Please don’t say that. In truth, I wanted to do you a favor, with the hopes of building a stronger relationship with you.”

Sebas and company had lodged in this inn under the backstory of being an heiress and her faithful butler who hailed from a city in some part of the Empire. They had then shown the ample purchasing power such a background would merit, in order to see how the people around them would react. The favor Bardo wanted to do was calculated to ingratiate himself with such wealthy people.

Sebas smiled gently at the fish which had taken the bait:

“I will relay your kindness to the Young Mistress’ father (my master), Bardo-san.”

A faint gleam crept into Bardo’s eyes, but he swiftly concealed it. Normal people would not have perceived that momentary glittering. However, that brief exposure was more than enough for Sebas to notice it.

“Then, though I apologize for my rudeness, I must make a move first, for the Young Mistress is waiting.”

Sebas took the initiative before Bardo could speak.

Bardo — who had been seen through — blinked and studied Sebas' expression briefly, before sighing:

"—hm, it can't be helped, then. Sebas-san, when you come to this city again, please look for me. I will welcome you warmly."

"Very well. When the time comes, we will be in your care."

As he watched Bardo leave, Sebas muttered to himself:

"Humans really are a varied bunch."

Sebas could sense that Bardo's actions were not purely motivated by personal gain. He was genuinely concerned for the girl and her butler.

It was because of people like these, who wanted to help those in need, that he could not bring himself to hate humanity.

An unforced smile bloomed on Sebas' face.

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Sebas knocked several times, announced himself, and then entered the room.
"Forgive my unsightly conduct from earlier, Sebas-sama."
As Sebas closed the door after himself, a bowing girl greeted him. Anyone who had witnessed the scene in the dining room from earlier would probably be stunned, because the girl who greeted him was the selfish, temperamental, tantrum-throwing heiress from just now.

She had a serious expression on her face, as though her hysterics from just now had been nothing more than an act.

Her attitude was one which a subordinate would use to greet a superior.

Her clothes and her face were the same, but it seemed as though she were a completely different person.

Another thing was that she had one eye — her left eye — closed. She had not closed that eye while she was in the dining hall.

“There is no need to apologize. You were simply doing your job.”

Sebas looked around the luxurious suite. Of course, it was hardly impressive to Sebas, who was in charge of the 9th Floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. His lack of surprise was simply because it was a poor choice for comparison.

From what he could see, there were stacks of luggage in the corner of the room. They were packed and ready for travel, and not by Sebas. The preparations had been completed by the only other person in the room.

“I’ll tidy up the rest.”

“What are you saying, Sebas-sama? How could I possibly inconvenience you any further?”

The girl who raised her head to answer him was one of the battle maids (Pleiades) — Solution Epsilon.

“Really now? But I am playing the role of your butler now, am I not?”

There was a mischievous grin on Sebas’ wrinkled face.

After seeing Sebas’ smile, Solution’s face changed for the first time, to an uncomfortable smile.

“Indeed, you are my butler for now. However, I am also your subordinate, Sebas-sama.”

“...Well, that’s true, Then, as your superior, I shall issue an order to you; your tasks are complete, and it is my turn to work. Rest here until we set out.”

“...Yes. Thank you.”

“Then, I shall go meet Shalltear-sama on the coach and inform her when we are leaving. She must be getting tired of waiting.”

Sebas easily lifted up one of the biggest pieces of luggage before suddenly speaking, as though he had just thought of something.

“Speaking of which, is he moving as we expected?”

“Yes, all is proceeding as predicted.”

Solution pressed the skin which covered her tightly-shut eye.

“That’s good to hear. Then, what’s his situation?”

“Yes — currently, he is meeting with a dishevelled-looking man. Do you wish to hear what they are saying?”

“There is no need for that. I’ll be moving the luggage, so give me a summary report afterwards.”

“Understood.”

Solution’s face suddenly twisted.

The corners of her eyes dropped while her mouth curved upwards. While it vaguely resembled a smile, the contortions required to produce such an expression would be impossible for a human being to achieve. Perhaps it would be better to describe it as a distorted face made of clay.

“—Ah, that’s right. Sebas-sama, please permit me to change the topic.”

“What is it, Solution?”

“...After all this is over, may I dispose of that man?”

Sebas freed up a hand to stroke his moustache and considered the matter.

“—Only with Shalltear-sama’s permission. However, if she allows it, you may do as you please.”

Solution’s forehead furrowed slightly, the disappointment on her face speaking for herself. As though to comfort her, Sebas continued speaking:

“It’ll be fine. Giving you one human should not be a problem.”

“Is that so? I understand. Then, please tell Shalltear-sama that I would like that man, if possible.”

Solution was all smiles. That sunny, cheerful expression would entrance anyone who saw it.

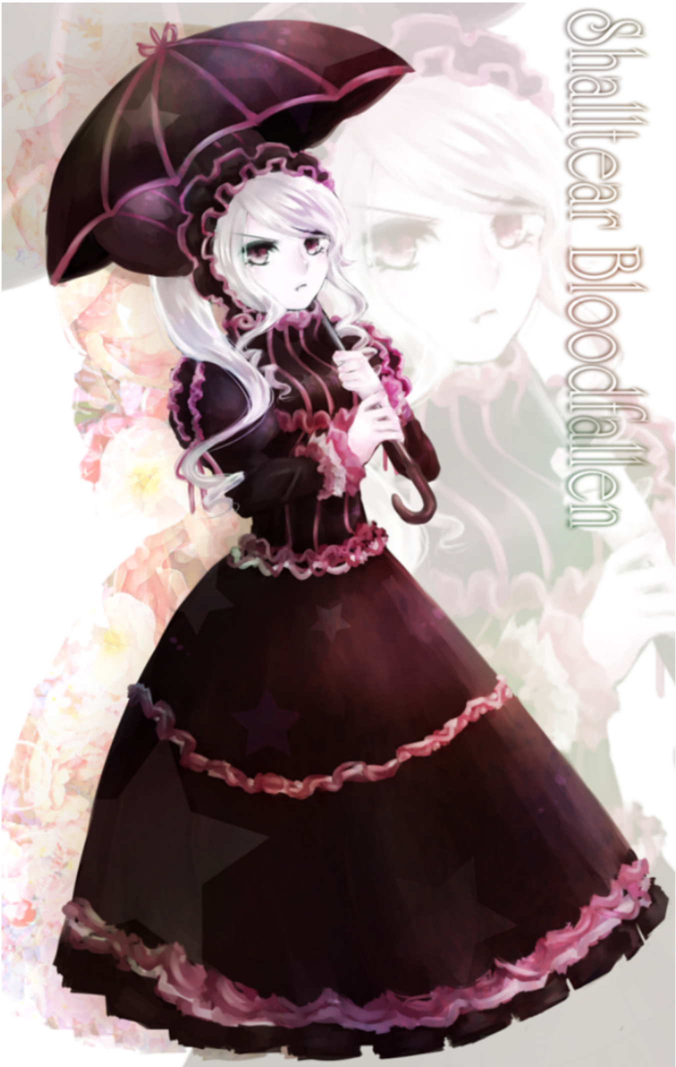
Sebas simultaneously pitied and wanted to know more about the man who could put a look like that on Solution’s face. Therefore, he asked her:

“What did that man say?”

“Oh, something about ‘I can’t wait to have fun with her’, so since these chances are hard to come by, I intend to have fun with him as well.”

Solution’s smile beamed ever brighter.

That smile — as innocent as a child’s — looked forward to what would come next.


Shalltear Bloodfallen

## Part 2

A pitiful life.

As Zack moved with hurried steps, he thought about how pitiful his life had been.

He had been born to a farmer’s family in a village of the Kingdom. It could not be considered a happy life by any stretch of the word.

The fruits of their hard labor were taken away by the lord of the land. If he took 60% of their harvest, it might still be bearable. They could still live on the remaining 40%, albeit in poverty.

However, if he took 80% of their harvest, they would be in big trouble. It was hard enough to survive on 40% of the crops. If they only had 20% left, their lives would be extremely difficult.

During that year when they had only been allowed to keep 20% of their harvest, Zack returned home, exhausted from a day of hard fieldwork, and found that his little sister was missing.

At that time, Zack was young and did not know what was going on. His beloved little sister had disappeared, yet his parents had not gone looking for her. Zack understood now that she had probably been sold off. Slavery was now outlawed through the efforts of the “Golden Princess”, but at that time it had been quite widespread throughout the Kingdom.

Therefore, whenever Zack went whoring and passed a hooker, he could not help but look at the girl’s face. Of course, he did not think he would actually be able to find his little sister, and even if he did find her, he did not know what he would say to her. Even so, he could not help but keep looking.

And amidst this miserable life of poverty, he was conscripted.

The Kingdom periodically mobilized its armies against the Empire, and when it did so, the Kingdom would round up all the able-bodied men in the villages and send them to the battlefield. The absence of their strong young men for a month had dire consequences for the villages. However, some people were grateful for this conscription.

After all, the less mouths to feed, the less food the families would need. In addition, the young conscripts would be fed by the Kingdom. For some, it might be the first time they had ever eaten their fill.

Still, that was all the merit that situation held. No matter how hard a man fought, he would not be rewarded unless he had made outstanding accomplishments. No, sometimes these men would not be rewarded no matter what they did. Only the lucky would be rewarded. Then, when they returned to their villages, they still had to face the despondent reality that the harvest was poor, because there had been too few hands to take it in.

Zack had been conscripted twice, but his third tour of duty had seen his fortunes change.

That war had been the same as all the others, ending after a few minor skirmishes. Zack, who had held on to his life, was about to head home when he stopped. He looked at the weapon in his hand, and it was as though he had received a sign from the heavens.

Instead of returning to his village, why not live differently?

Still, Zack was a mere farmer with just a bit of basic training. He had few choices in the sort of new life he could lead.

He did not possess exceptional physical abilities, nor did he possess a talent, a special ability only had by a few special people. His learning was largely related to farming — when to sow which seeds, and so on.

What Zack decided to do pertained to the sole trump card he possessed; in other words, running away with the weapon that the

Kingdom had temporarily issued him. He had not considered the difficulties it would cause for his parents because they had sold off his little sister — even if it was to keep the rest of the family alive — and thus he did not love his parents.

But how could someone who did not know the land or have any backers desert so easily? In the end, he managed to find people to help him, which was fortunate, in a sense.

The people who aided him in deserting were a band of sellswords.

Of course, a farmer like Zack was hardly of any use to a mercenary band. However, the band had lost many of its members during the war, and their aim was to replenish their numbers as soon as possible.

This was the reason why the mercenary band let him join so easily. However, they were not a proper, law-abiding organization. While they fought as mercenaries in wartime, during peacetime they were essentially bandits.

After that, Zack led a life filled with unspeakable deeds.

Having was better than not having. Taking was better than being taken from. It was better to make people weep than to cry bitter tears.

This was the life Zack lived.

He did not feel it was wrong, nor did he regret it.

His faith in that grew ever deeper every time he heard the wails of the oppressed.

♦♦♦

Zack ran through the pauper’s district. He ran toward a world that was a deeper red than the setting sun.

Having run continuously ever since leaving the inn, he was panting heavily and his forehead was covered in sweat. His building fatigue made him want to stop, and he wondered if he should take a break. However, time was tight, and so Zack spurred his tired body forward and continued running.

Just then, as Zack took a sharp turn—

“That was close~” mumbled the figure on the other side of the corner as it somersaulted away, accompanied by the clattering of metal.

A startled Zack looked at the black shape which had leapt clear.

She was a pretty girl. She wore a black cape which made her seem to blend into the shadows, but her shiny purple eyes, filled with curiosity, were looking straight at Zack.

Tired and out of patience, Zack yelled at her.

“That’s my line! It’s dangerous! Watch where you’re going!”

The girl did not seem afraid of Zack’s ranting. Instead, she smiled coldly.

That spine-chilling smile made Zack retreat instinctively, without the courage to so much as draw his weapon. It was like a lion glaring at a mouse.

Perhaps the sound of metal he heard when the girl had leapt back came from the armor she was wearing.

An armed and armored girl — perhaps she was an adventurer.

He had picked the wrong person to antagonize.

Danger sirens blared through Zack's head, and at the same time he thought of something.

He did not look down on her as weak because she was a woman. Zack knew that there was an adventurer team composed purely of strong women. The strongest man in the mercenary band he belonged to had brought it up once.

On the other hand, Zack might have been a mercenary, but he was one of the weakest members of their fighting men. This was why he had been given a job like this.

He was covered in sweat from running, and as Zack began regretting what he had done, it quickly became another type of sweat altogether.

Just as a look of fear completely covered Zack's face, the girl's smile lost its frightening quality.

"Hm~ Ah well, forget it. I don't have time for this. Still, if I run into you again, you're going to have a bad time~"

The girl went around him, leaving those words behind. Interested, Zack turned to watch as she left. He mused that the place in front of him was an uninhabited part of the pauper's district.

What was a beautiful woman doing out here so late? The thought piqued his curiosity, but he had something more important waiting for him, so he cut his introspection short and moved on.

Soon, he arrived in the pauper's district, at a corner which was filled with many run-down houses. He looked around to see if anyone was following him.

The sun slowly sank beneath the horizon, painting the world in shades of black, so Zack focused on whether anyone was hiding in dark corners. He had already checked several times before now, but just to be safe, he took one last look.

Zack nodded in satisfaction, and as he got his breathing under control, he knocked thrice on a door. After waiting five seconds, he knocked four more times.

After giving the prearranged signal, he received an immediate response. The creaking of wood came from the other side of the door, and the wooden shutter which blocked the peephole slid out of the way. Zack could see a man's eyes on the other side of the door, looking him up and down and verifying his identity.

"It's you. Ah, wait a minute."

Without waiting for Zack's reply, the man slid the peephole shut, and that sound was followed by that of a heavy lock disengaging. The door cracked open slightly.

"Come in."

There was a faint scent of rot coming from within the room, which was as far removed from the place Zack had been as the heavens were from the earth. Hoping that his nose could get used to the smell, Zack nimbly wriggled into the room.

Once the door shut, he saw that the interior was tiny and dark.

The door led directly to the kitchen and dining room, which was furnished with a table. There was a candle on the table, whose feeble light somewhat dispelled the darkness of the room.

A filthy man who looked like he dealt in violence for a living pulled up a nearby chair and took a seat. The chair creaked as he sat on it, as though moaning in pain. The man was heavily muscled and had a barrel chest, and the exposed parts of his arms and his face were lightly scarred. The chair looked like it was going to give way under his weight.

“Oh, Zack. What’s wrong, what happened?”

“There’s been a change in the situation… The prey is preparing to move.”

“Ah — so we’ll have to make our move as well.”

Zack nodded silently. The man quietly grumbled, “Why now… can’t they think of us a little?” as he reached up to scratch his messy hair.

“Can’t you delay them somehow?”

“That’ll be difficult, because it was that woman’s request.”

The man had already heard Zack talk about that woman several times, and he frowned deeply.

“That old man should use his brains a little and try to talk her down. The roads at night are nasty places to be, with scary bandits showing up and all. Give me a break… even an idiot knows about that sort of thing. Ah, how about sabotaging a coach wheel and dragging out the departure until tomorrow?”

“That won’t work — he’s already loading the luggage. It would be better to act quickly, right?”

“Mm, that’s true…”

The man stared into the air as he thought.

“Then, when are they moving out?”

“In about two hours.”

“That’ll be cutting it really close. Ah — what should I do. I’ll need to contact the others after this… With only two hours… It’ll be hard, but they’re prize catches…”

The man twiddled his thumbs as he considered how much time the entire process would take. Zack simply listened to his musings in silence, looking down at his hands.

“Rich people like that piss you off, right…”

Zack thought of the delicate, dainty hands of the girl who was addressed as the Young Mistress.

Nobody who worked on a farm would have hands as pretty as that. Their skin was split from icy water and thickened by swinging a hoe, and even their nails grew gnarled. A farmer’s hands were like that.

He knew well that the world was unfair. However—

The corner of Zack’s mouth twisted up in a lewd smile that bared his teeth.

“Can I have some fun with that woman?”

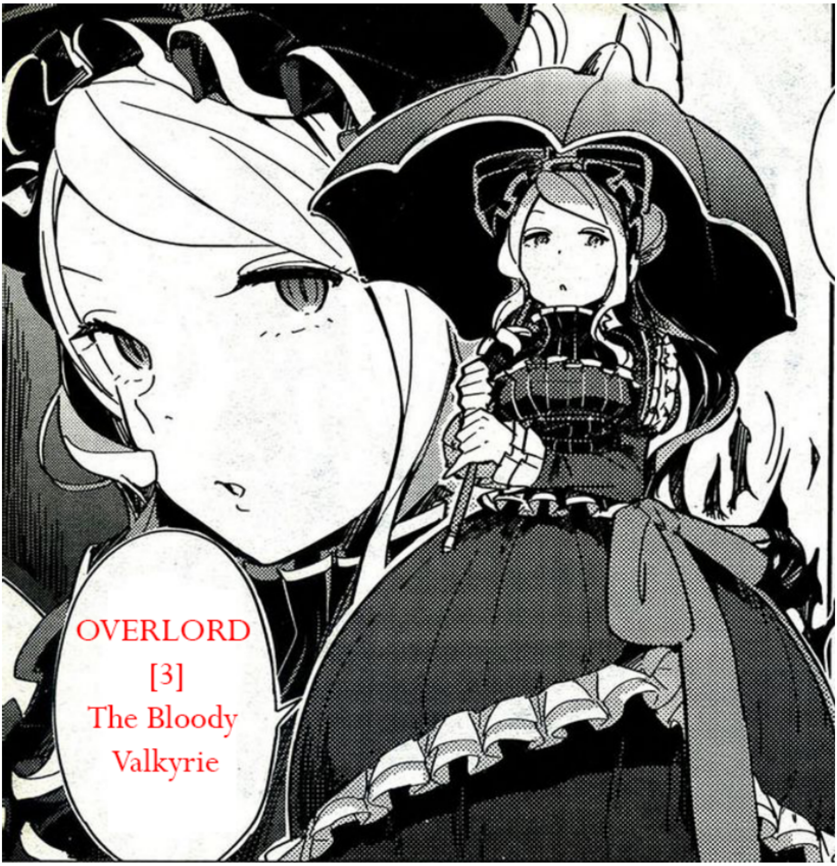
“You’ll have to wait for us to finish first, and since we’re going to ransom her off, you can’t go too far! Don’t hurt her too badly.”

The man sneered in lasciviously. Perhaps it was because of his rising desire, but he suddenly got to his feet.

“All right, we’ll do it. I’ll contact the chief.”

“Got it.”

“We’ll send about ten guys ahead to the usual place to ambush them. You should move too and get them there in about four hours’ time. If you haven't arrived by then, we'll make the first move. So keep the prey obedient and lower their guard."


OVERLORD
[3]
The Bloody Valkyrie

## Part 3

A stagecoach galloped away from the Fortress City.

It was a large vehicle that could comfortably seat six people, pulled by a quartet of horses.

The disc of the full moon shone in the night sky, illuminating the land with surprising brightness. That said, racing at full speed through the night was still a foolish course of action. The wisest course of action would have been to pitch tents, light lanterns, and post sentries while they spent the night here.

The world at night was not under mankind’s control. No, that would not be entirely accurate — no place without light could be considered part of humanity’s world. The night concealed all manner of animals, demihumans and monsters. Many creatures possessed the gift of darkvision, and these creatures often attacked humanity.

Still, the passengers in the stagecoach barely felt their vehicle galloping through the perilous night.

This was not because of good shock absorbers or the like, but because the coach was travelling along a cobblestoned road.

The paving of roads had begun after the suggestion of the “Golden Princess”, but the only places where it had been completed were in those demesnes held by the Crown and by Marquis Raeven, one of the Six Great Nobles. This was because the other nobles protested this gesture, feeling that such roads would only benefit the Empire when they attacked the Kingdom.

The maintenance costs for those roads had also sparked much debate. The reason why Princess Renner had reached out to traders to foot the bill was because the nobles in charge of the areas through which the roads passed were dragging their feet on the matter. Thus, the paving work was in this a sad state of affairs.

Since this region was not too far from E-Rantel — which was administered by the Crown — the work here was of quite a high standard.

Still, it was not perfect. The wagon wobbled a little as it travelled along the street, and some faint vibrations made their way to the passengers.

These tremors terminated the conversation between the occupants of the vehicle.

Among these occupants were Sebas, with Solution by his side. Opposite him was Shalltear, flanked by two of the Vampire Brides who were her minions-cum-concubines. Zack was obviously driving the wagon from the driver's seat.

A brief silence filled the air inside the wagon, and then at great length, Sebas spoke to break it:

"There is one thing I have been meaning to ask you for a while."

"Mm? What do you have in mind?"

"I noticed that you and Aura-sama do not get along very well. Is there any particular reason for that?"

"...Actually, I feel we do get along quite well."

As Shalltear answered quietly, she stared at the nail of her pinky finger, as though bored.

The pearly-white fingernail was about 2cm long. Although she had a file in hand, the nail looked quite neatly trimmed, so there was no need to work further on it. Shalltear also felt that further action was unnecessary, so she tossed the file to one of the Vampire Brides by her side.

After that, she made to grope the breasts of the vampires beside her with her now-empty hands. However, when she noticed the expressions on the two people in front of her, she retracted her hands, a somewhat embarrassed look on her face.

“It does not seem that way,” Sebas continued. Shalltear’s face wrinkled up, like she had eaten something bitter, and then she replied:

“I… I think we do get along. I simply tease her a little because my creator, Peroroncino-sama, designed me to feud with her. Still, there is no real enmity there. Perhaps Bukubukuchagama-sama designed that girl to not get along with me as well.”

Shalltear waved her hand, as though she were very bored, and then met Sebas’ gaze for the first time.

“Speaking of which, my creator Peroroncino-sama and that girl’s creator — Bukubukuchagama-sama — were elder sister and younger brother. So in that sense, she and I are also sisters.”

“A sibling relationship — I see!”

“In the past, Peroroncino-sama discussed the matter with other Supreme Beings — Luci★Fer-sama and Nishiki Enrai-sama — when they came to my domain.”

A look of reverence crept into Shalltear’s eyes as she recounted her memories of accompanying these exalted personages.

“Peroroncino-sama once mentioned that Bukubukuchagama had the profession of a seiyuu. So popular was she that she even lent her talents to things called ‘aerogays’, so whenever he purchased a game he eagerly anticipated, he would end up thinking of his sister’s face and he would lose his motivation.”

Shalltear added that she did not know what he meant by that. A somewhat baffled Sebas tilted his head and said:

"A seiyuu… I remember that seems to be a line of work which involves the use of sound. It seems they are skilled in singing, so perhaps it should be similar to a bard."

After hearing Sebas' answer, Shalltear laughed, like the tinkling of silver bells, and replied in the negative:

"That is not the case."

"It is not? How so?"

"I once heard Bukubukuchagama-sama say that being a seiyuu meant giving a soul through sound. In other words, a seiyuu is a job which creates life."

"Ohhh! I see. It seems I was laboring under a grave misconception. Thank you very much for your correction, Shalltear-sama."

Sebas and all the others created by the Supreme Beings were infused with knowledge upon their creation, but that was all they had. Because they did not know real life, amusing mishaps sometimes occurred; like say, making a mistake about their revered masters' jobs.

Feeling terribly uncomfortable, Sebas muttered to himself, engraving the meaning of being a seiyuu into his heart so he would not make the same mistake again.

"There's no need to take it to heart… ah, right, Sebas, since we are fellow travellers, there's no need to be so formal."

"Is that so, Shalltear-sama?"

"Don't address me as -sama… we are all servants of the Supreme Beings. They may have handed down our positions and set some of us over others, but the truth is that we're all basically the same."

She had the right of it. Solution was only obeying Sebas because she had been ordered to do so. Originally, she and Sebas were of the same status.

“I understand, Shalltear. Then, I shall address you in this way from now on.”

“That’s good to hear. Come to think of it, you don’t get along with Demiurge either, do you?”

Sebas remained silent. Shalltear narrowed her eyes, like a playful child, and continued asking:

“The Supreme Beings did not design you that way, so why is that?”

“...I wonder. The truth is, I don’t know why that is the case as well. It must be some sort of instinct that makes me dislike him. However the same should apply to him as well.”

“Hmm — it doesn’t seem that way to me… still, it might be because the feelings of our creators, the Supreme Beings, were deeply engraved within our hearts.”

“That is very likely to be the case.”

Shalltear carefully studied Sebas, who nodded to her. Then, after considering his position, Shalltear felt that he would know the answer to the question which had long hidden in her heart:

“What kind of people are found in the 8th Floor? I know about Victim, but who else is there besides him?”

Sebas frowned at the sudden query. He looked at Shalltear, a stern expression on his face, trying to discern what she was up to. From where she was seated to the side, Solution’s expression changed as well, though it was subtle enough that the others did not notice.

“...In the past, there were fools who defied the Supreme Beings and invaded Nazarick, breaching the defenses of the 7th Floor. However, they did not reach the 9th Floor, where the Supreme Beings resided. That being the case, they must have been stopped at the 8th Floor, right? Though I do not have any recollection of the event, the opposition must have brought fearsome fighting power with them to make it that far in, so I believe they were halted with equally extraordinary might. However, I have no idea who intercepted the intruders. No, Albedo should know. After all, she is the Guardian Overseer of Nazarick. It would be strange if she did not know that.”

As though ignoring the silent Sebas, Shalltear continued asking:

“...It’s kind of annoying to hear she’s one step ahead of me. What sort of mysterious beings are found on the 8th Floor? Characters personally crafted by Ainz-sama, perhaps?”

Sebas was made by Touch Me. Demiurge was made by Ulbert Alain Odle. Cocytus was made by Warrior Takemikazuchi. However, even Shalltear did not know what sort of NPC that Ainz — or Momonga, the highest-ranked of the 41 Supreme Beings — had created.

Surely he had created somebody, right?

That being the case, it was reasonable to conclude that this mysterious character resided on the 8th Floor, about which Shalltear had no knowledge.

“...No, that should not be the case. This is just a rumor, but I heard that the NPC Ainz created is called Pandora’s Actor, and his strength is comparable to the rest of us Guardians. Apparently, he defends the depths of the Treasury.”

“Does someone like that really exist?”

Unlike Albedo, Shalltear had not been infused with knowledge about everyone in Nazarick. Therefore, this name was new to her.

Granted, the Treasury was a place which one could only enter with the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, but it would be strange to leave it unguarded.

The depths of the Treasury.

All the highest-end magic items that Ainz Ooal Gown had collected were stored in there. It was also said that it contained several World-Class Items. That being the case, it was the most suitable location for the NPC created by the greatest of the 41 Supreme Beings, Ainz, to defend.

Shalltear's pride was somewhat bruised as she considered that she had not been chosen to guard such exalted ground, but she consoled herself with the thought that it was unavoidable. To Shalltear, keeping intruders from straying beyond the 3rd Floor was also a crucial task, every bit as important as protecting the Treasury.

And now, her master had given her another vital task.

"Indeed, but I have not seen that person before. After all, one cannot travel to that place without a Ring."

"Oh…"

Shalltear's answer was devoid of energy, as though she had lost all interest in the whole thing. However, Sebas did not seem to mind.

"Still, the 8th Floor is a mysterious place… it's kind of a shame."

"Indeed. After all, it is a place that even we cannot enter. There must be something inside."

“And what exactly is that something?”

“Could it be there’s a trap in there which might even attack us?”

“Mm, that’s not a bad idea, though if I had to guess… could it be a deathtrap that indiscriminately kills anyone who enters it?”

“The Great Tomb of Nazarick was hand-crafted by the Supreme Beings, and defended by us, who have pledged our lives in service. Anyone who could penetrate an impregnable fortress like that and breach the 7th Floor would probably not be stopped by a trap like that…”

“Do you want to take a look?”

Shalltear had a smile on her face, like a child up to some mischief. Sebas’ smile was the same as always, but there was a certain nuance to it now.

“Do you intend to defy Ainz-sama’s wishes?”

“Just kidding, just kidding. It was just a joke, no need to look so scary.”

“Shalltear… curiosity killed the cat. We should wait quietly until Ainz-sama tells us otherwise.”

“You’ve got a point there… then, has our prey taken the bait?”

Sebas did not ask about the sudden change in topic. Instead he directly replied:

“Yes, they’ve fallen for it hook, line and sinker. All we need to do is reel them in.”

Shalltear nodded slightly, and then she lightly licked her lips. Her crimson pupils blazed.

Sebas immediately realized what would put Shalltear in a mood like that. Sensing that this was the perfect time to do so, he decided to bring up Solution’s request from earlier.

“I have a request to make concerning this matter, Shalltear.”

“...What is it?”

The reply was one of annoyance, given that Sebas had jolted Shalltear out of her delight over what was soon to unfold. As though to comfort her, Sebas continued:

“Could you give the driver of our coach to this girl?”

“...Is he an underling?”

“Indeed. One could call him a messenger.”

Shalltear closed her eyes and pondered the request. After considering several possibilities, she seemed to have come to a conclusion, and she nodded.

“That should be fine. Besides, he doesn’t look like he’d taste good if I fed on him.”

“You have my sincerest thanks for your generosity, Shalltear.”

“Thank you, Shalltear-sama.”

“Ah, you’re welcome, think nothing of it.”

Shalltear was quite surprised by how tenderly Solution smiled to her. She had not expected such a sincere expression. Then, Shalltear composed herself and turned to Sebas.

“Then, we’re even for that little mistake of mine just now.”

“I understand… In truth, I didn’t expect you to do anything quite as foolish as that. It was merely a jest, was it not?”

“Indeed, you’re right. If you had said such a thing, Sebas, I would have taken it as a joke as well. Then I would have my subordinates watch you in silence. At the first sight of any treachery on your part, I would remove your limbs and have your torso dragged in chains before Ainz-sama.”

“I’m hardly as ruthless as you are, Shalltear.”

“No? Things like that only make me doubt your loyalty more — you would do that too, wouldn’t you?”

Sebas and Shalltear locked eyes, and smiled from the bottoms of their hearts.

“Besides, I like cute girls the best. There might be a different sort of entertainment in giving him to Solution.”

“—Then, how do you intend to capture them? Through [Paralysis] or [Hold Person]?”

Before they had set out for E-Rantel, Ainz had given Sebas an order: “I want to capture humans who know martial arts or magic. However, you will only go after criminals whose absence will go unnoticed.”

Therefore, Solution and Sebas had played the role of a stuck-up, stubborn heiress and her easily-bamboozled butler, with the intention of hooking a fish like Zack.

Shalltear’s mission, on the other hand, was to use a fish like that to net the entire school which followed him.

“Why would I go to such great lengths? Ainz-sama did say that it was alright to drain them dry and turn them into slaves. The important things was that I absolutely had to capture them. Still… investigating them all one by one would be a hassle, so I might as well just suck them all dry.”

Sebas did not speak the words in his heart — “I see” — but instead nodded. Still, he had to acknowledge that he was not entirely comfortable with Shalltear’s interpretation of her orders. With that in mind, Sebas could not help but say:

“From that point of view, Demiurge-sama would be the most suitable for that sort of work. After all, he can control his opponent’s thoughts, much like Aura-sama can with her breath.”

Demiurge possessed a skill known as [Command Mantra]. It was a powerful mind-affecting ability which would be invaluable during a capture operation like this.

“...Hah?” Shalltear exclaimed in an unbelievably low tone.

The mood within the coach turned grim immediately, as though a fog of bone-chilling cold hung in the air.

Even the horses pulling the coach seemed to have sensed this, because the vehicle suddenly lurched. The bloodless faces of the Vampire Brides flanking Shalltear turned even paler than usual, while Solution shuddered in her place beside Sebas. Even Sebas, whose might should have been on par with Shalltear’s, could feel goosebumps breaking out on him.

This was the murderous intent emitted by the strongest of Nazarick’s Floor Guardians. The hostility which wreathed her made her previous spats with Aura seem like child’s play. If the situation was mishandled, it might lead to a life-or-death melee.

As Shalltear chilled the air ever further, the color of her crimson pupils began to spill out into her sclera, dying her eyes red as though they were filling with blood.

“Sebas — could you say that again? Or are you saying that a Dragonoid like yourself, in that form, wants to —”

Her eyeballs — now completely red — twitched:

“—Wants to start a fight with me?”

“I misspoke, please forgive me. I was merely a little uneasy. It would be fine as long as your ‘Blood Frenzy” doesn’t kick in.”

Shalltear’s response was silence.

Sebas could tell that the brief silence was a sign of her unease toward herself.

In YGGDRASIL, strong classes were typically balanced out with weaknesses and penalties. One of the penalties Shalltear suffered from was called “Blood Frenzy”. The more fresh blood that covered her body, the greater her urge to slaughter. While this made her stronger, in return she would no longer be able to control her actions.

The reason why Ainz had made use of Shalltear for this mission — who might have ended up ignoring orders or even going berserk — was due to a process of elimination.

Albedo had to remain in the Great Tomb of Nazarick in Ainz’s absence, and among the two remaining Guardians — Shalltear and Cocytus — Shalltear looked more like a human being from a distance.

After that, Shalltear took several deep breaths. She seemed to be trying to suck her anger back up, or perhaps she was trying to quell the uneasiness in her heart.

With her last breath, Shalltear resumed her normal expression — an attractive young girl with a seductive air about her — and her pupils returned to their original color.

“...For the most part, they’ll become my slaves after I drain their blood, which should make things simple. Besides, we don’t need to bring them back alive. Ainz-sama brought it up before as well. Also, I will definitely keep my Blood Frenzy under control.”

Vampires were a species which could drain a victim’s blood and turn them into perfectly loyal minions. Most Vampires could only create unintelligent Lesser Vampires in this way, but the Vampires which Shalltear could make had nearly as much intelligence as a normal human.

As long as one did not care if the prey was alive or dead, Shalltear qualified as quite a good hunter, although the number of Vampires she could create was limited.

“That’s right, so there’s no need to say more. I will accomplish the mission Ainz-sama gave me without fail, so he will praise me with ‘Well done, Shalltear, you are my most important slave’, and then say, ‘You are the one most worthy of standing by my side.’”

“Please forgive my shallow comments.”

Sebas’ apology was sincere and came from the heart. It was not just directed to Shalltear, but to someone else.

“I did not realize that my statements were a slight on Ainz-sama, who chose you for this task, and I apologize for that as well. I hope you will forgive me for displeasing you.”

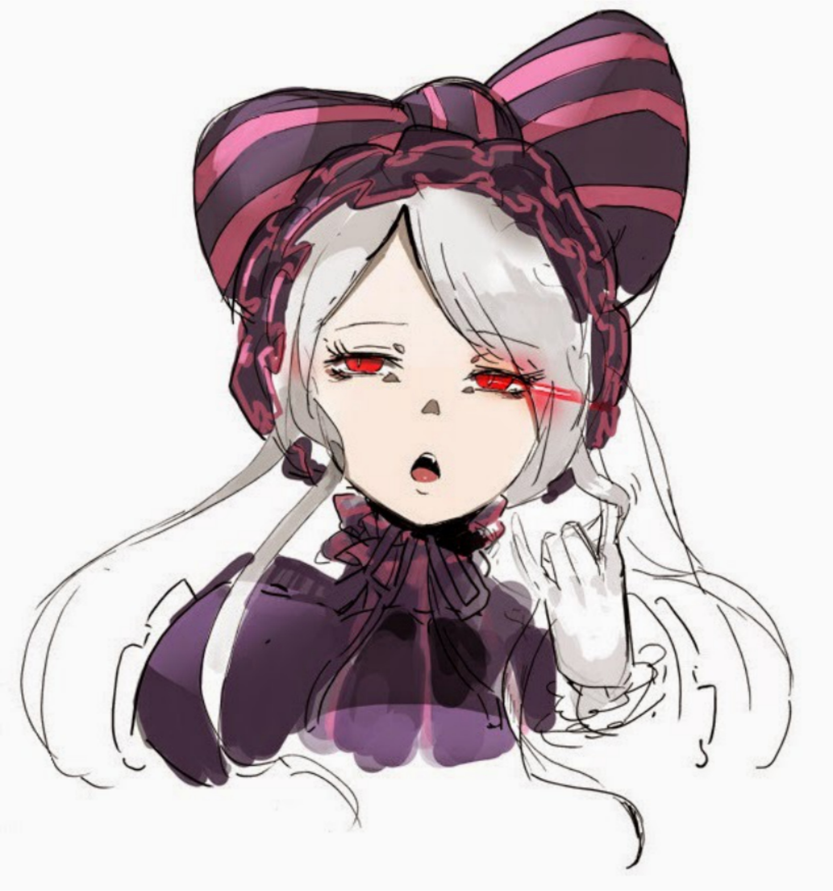
Then, he bowed to Solution and the Vampire Brides in apology —

Just then, the coach shuddered, and they heard neighing from the horses which drew the vehicle.

“...It seems we have stopped.”

“Indeed.”

Shalltear — lost as she was in fantasies of the praise her master would lavish on her once she succeeded in her task — returned to her senses. She smiled, like a girl who had just thought up a wonderful prank to play. Sebas too was stroking his moustache as he smiled.



## Part 4

About ten strong men had emerged from the forest, forming a semicircle around the coach. None of these men was equipped in exactly the same way. Still, while they were not masterworks, their equipment was not of poor make. It was clear that they had hand-picked their weapons.

The casual way in which they were discussing how to deal with their target and the order in which they would go sounded like they already had their prey in the bag. Indeed, they had done this sort of thing countless times in the past. It would be strange if they had felt worried.

After Zack leapt off the driver’s seat, he jogged over to the men who had appeared.

While dismounting from the driver’s seat, he had cut the reins so the coach would not be able to drive off, and after monkeying with the coach doors, they would only open on the side facing the men.

The men brandished their weapons so their prey could see. This was a wordless warning: if they did not come out quickly, they would be in trouble.

In response, the coach doors slowly opened.

A beautiful woman revealed herself under the moonlight. The gathered sellswords and bandits laughed coarsely and looked on her with lustful eyes. It was clear from their expressions that they were delighted.

However, one person among them was taken aback. That person was Zack.

His surprise could be summarized in three words: “Who is this?” Zack had never seen this beauty before. However, the coach was very familiar to him, and the contrast between the two plunged Zack into confusion and left him speechless.

After that, another beautiful woman appeared, dressed much like the first. Doubt began blooming on the men’s faces. Their targets should have been an heiress who did not know how the world worked, as well as an old butler.

And then, a girl who might have been considered “little” showed up, and their doubts vanished.

Her silvery hair gleamed in the moonlight, and her dewy, crimson eyes held a seductive radiance.

The bandits could only gasp at the sight of these beauties, unable to so much as muster up the words for praise. In this moment, even their bestial lust shrank away in the face of true beauty.

Shalltear smiled lewdly as she bathed in the enthralled gazes of the men. She advanced unguardedly before them and said:

“Gentlemen, thank you for coming all this way here for me. May I know who is your leader? May I negotiate with him?”

After seeing the bandits look toward the same person, Shalltear learned what she needed to know. That was to say, everyone else here was expendable.

“You… what do you want to talk about?”

The man who looked like their leader seemed to have come to his senses after his close encounter with these beautiful women. He strode forward.

“Ahh, please forgive the misunderstanding. What I meant by ‘negotiations’ was just a joke for me to learn what I needed to know. Sorry about that.”

“Who *are* you people…”

Shalltear looked to Zack, who had asked that question.

“You must be that Zack fellow. I will give you to Solution as promised, so could you please step aside for a while?”

Some of the bandits sought an answer for their confusion in each others’ faces. However, among them —

“Hmph, you’ve got a good body for a brat. I’ll make you cry for me in a bit.”

The bandit who happened to be standing in front of Shalltear reached out to grope that ample bust of hers, which did not match her age.

And then — the appendage tumbled to the ground.

“Could you not touch me with your filthy hand?”

The dumbfounded man looked at his now handless arm, and after a moment’s delay, he wailed:

“Ahhhhhhhh! My, my haaaaaaaand—!”

“You’re making so much noise over losing a single hand. Are you even a man?”

Shalltear casually flicked her hand as she muttered quietly, and the man’s head fell to the earth as well.

How had she chopped his head off with her unarmed, dainty and slender hands? The nightmare before them hardly seemed real. The bandits were terrified beyond all capacity for rational thought, unable to react in the wake of this tremendous shock. However, what they saw next snapped them back to their senses.

The fresh blood spurting from the severed portions of the body moved as though it had a will of its own, gathering above Shalltear’s head and forming an orb of blood.

Shalltear and company knew this was the effect of the skill called [Blood Pool]. However, the first thing these clueless bandits thought as they saw this inhuman ability was:

“She’s a magic caster!”

Anyone who understood magic should have been able to give a more accurate warning. “Magic casters” was a very broad term which referred to many professions and jobs, and the means of dealing with them were just as varied. In particular, one might think of Shalltear — who only wore a dress — as an arcane magic caster, or perhaps a spiritual magic caster. However, none of them spoke a warning like that. One could thus conclude that none of them knew anything about magic. In other words, they thought of anything they could not understand as magic.

As Shalltear realised this, she looked disinterestedly at these panicking bandits, who desperately raised their swords against her.

“How boring. Clean this mess up. Also, leave this one and that one… understood?”

“Yes, Shalltear-sama.”

The Vampire Brides waiting behind Shalltear on either side stepped forward, and one of them punched the face of a bandit trying to attack Shalltear, sending him flying.

It looked as though someone had swung a metal pole into his face with all their strength.

The bandits arced through the air, accompanied by the sound of something like a filled balloon popping. All manner of bodily fluids — blood, brain matter, and more — burst forth from his skull. The gore gleamed under the moonlight, looking all the more beautiful for its horrific appearance.

More than half of the bandit's head went flying, and pinkish brains sprayed from the shattered cranium. Pulled by gravity, the bandit's corpse rolled to the ground with a great thud. That sound was a starting bell which filled the bandits with terror, and Shalltear with delight.

♦♦♦

Zack smiled stiffly as he watched the scene in front of him.

It was a truly horrific sight.

He wanted to vomit as he smelled the blood which came from the carnage before him.

Men had their hands and feet torn off like scraps of paper, and skulls popped between paired hands like ripe pomegranates.

A breastplate was ripped off and a hand stabbed into the now-exposed belly. When it came back out, it took several meters of gleaming, slippery intestine with it. The fact that the victim was still alive after that spoke of the resilience of mankind.

A man was squirming on the ground, trying to flee even with both legs broken. White-colored objects — his broken bones — protruded through his skin and flesh. He was desperately trying to crawl away with his hands, struggling to get himself away from the source of this horror, wanting to stay alive for just one moment longer.

The beautiful girl looked at the man grovelling at her feet, and her shrill laugh was unpleasant.

*How had things ended up like this...*

Zack thought as hard as he could.

No matter how one tried to cloak it in politeness, the world still ran on the principle of the strong feeding on the weak. It was utterly natural for the strong to oppress the weak. After all, Zack had been doing so himself. However, was it right for the strong to go so far and do so much?

Of course not. He could not accept their cruel methods of killing. Then, what should he do? The enemy was simply choosing not to attack him, so if he tried to flee, they would probably do something to him to make him not dare to escape again. Something painful and nausea-inducing, for instance.

Zack felt for his hidden shortsword through his clothing.

Why was his sword so small? How could it possibly stand up to these monsters which could twist off men’s arms so effortlessly?

What had he done to them? He had never thought of doing anything to those monsters.

Zack hugged himself, as though trying to conceal his presence. The rhythmic grinding of his teeth suddenly struck him as extremely grating — what would happen if those monsters heard it and went after him?

He tried to stop himself, but his teeth would not listen to him and continued grinding.

Speaking of which, what kind of people were they? Zack did not recognize them at all.

And just as he thought about that —

“Zack-san,  come this way.”

—A gentle, dulcet voice came from behind him, completely at odds with the cruel scenery in front of him.

Zack looked fearfully behind himself, and saw his employer standing before him.

Her expression did not match the haughty and argumentative heiress that he knew her for. If he had been calm enough, he might have felt suspicious about this, but Zack — who had been driven into confusion by this bizarre world and the stink of blood — had no energy left to suspect anything.

“What are those monsters?!” Zack wailed, his voice cracking, at Solution, the moneyed daughter of nobility who knew nothing of the world.

“Why didn’t you tell me there were monsters like these around?!”

Indeed. If he had known about this beforehand, things would not have ended up like this. The bitch before him was responsible for the frightening scene before him.

“Don’t keep quiet, speak up! Let’s get this straight, this is all your fault!”

Anxiety and terror combined to impel him forward, and a furious Zack could no longer bear it. He reached out to grab Solution by the collar and roughly shook her.

“...I understand. Please follow me.”

“You… are you going to save me?!”

“No, I simply wish to take this last chance to enjoy you.”

An ivory-pale hand, cold as ice, gripped Zack's own, and then Solution stepped forward, pulling him away.

"Even though I already have permission, Sebas-sama does not like this sort of thing, so I would rather do it at a distance."

He had no idea what she was talking about. However, Zack felt that if he alone was being led away, there might be a chance that he could survive.

Zack pretended not to hear the horrific screams from behind him.

That could not be helped. Zack was too weak. He could not possibly save those comrades of his which were supposed to be stronger than him.

"Please don't be too excited. If possible… I'd like you to be gentle with me. It would make me very happy."

Behind the coach, Solution spoke softly to Zack as she waved him over, then reached behind her back, as though to undo her dress. As Zack saw this, he stared with his mouth open; *what was this woman up to*? Zack looked at Solution like she was some sort of exotic creature.

Solution's hands had not stopped at all during all this, and so a thoroughly confused Zack asked:

"You… What are you doing?"

"What do you think?"

With that, Solution easily peeled off her figure-hugging bodice.

As though waiting for that moment, her tightly-bound breasts sprang forth. They were firm, springy globes, and her skin seemed vaguely translucent under the moonlight.

Zack gulped at the sight before him.

“Please.”

Solution thrust her chest out, as though inviting him to fondle her.

“What do you want me to…”

Zack had forgotten himself as he fixated on the body before him.

She was beautiful. This was the most beautiful female body Zack had ever seen in his life.

Of all the girls Zack had partaken of, the most beautiful was one who belonged to a caravan which he had atacked. However, by the time it was Zack’s turn, the girl was exhausted. She lay motionless, only spreading her legs like a frog. Still, it had not detracted from her beauty in the least.

However, the girl before him was even more beautiful, and she was not unresponsive like the other girl.

Desire lit the flames of Zack’s lust, and the heat in his lower body began spreading out from his crotch. Panting like a dog, he reached out for Solution’s body.

It felt like — like silk.

Zack could no longer hold himself back, and he seized the more shapely of Solution’s breasts.

And then his entire hand sank into her.

Zack thought for a moment that her body was so soft that it felt as though his entire hand had gone into her. But as he looked at his hand, he realized that this was not the case.

Zack's hand had literally sunk into Solution's body.

"What… what the hell is this!"

Zack screamed in surprise and tried to pull his hand back, but he could not budge it. Not only did it not move back, it was sucked further in. It seemed as though there were many writhing tentacles inside Solution which had latched onto Zack's hand and were drawing him in.

Solution's beautiful face did not change even under these strange circumstances. She simply watched Zack in silence. Her expression was that of a scientist watching as a lab animal was injected with some lethal chemical, blending a cold dispassion with curiosity and excitement.

"Oi, stop! Let go of me!"

Zack balled up his other hand into a fist and swung with all his strength at Solution's pretty face.

Once, twice, three times—

Zack swung at full force, punching heavily and not caring if his fist was injured. That beautiful face remained unmoved despite a grown man striking it with all his might. It did not seem to hurt her at all.

Instead, Zack was frightened by what he felt when he hit her.

That sensation was like punching a soft, filled waterskin. Under normal circumstances, there should have been some resistance to his punch, but he did not feel that he had struck bone at all. This was not how punching a human being should have felt.

The unreal scene of carnage behind him — forgotten due to his excitement — suddenly flashed through his mind.

Zack choked back the impulse to scream.

Eventually, it dawned upon him.

The woman baring her chest to him before his eyes was also a monster.

“Did you finally realize it? Then, let’s begin the fun part, shall we?”

As she said that, a pain like the stabbing of hundreds of needles radiated from his stuck hand.

“Aaaahhhhh!”

“I am now dissolving your hand.”

Zack could not understand these cold words through the agony which gripped him. This was no longer in the realm of his comprehension.

“The truth is, I deeply enjoy watching things dissolve. Therefore, I felt it was a happy coincidence that you wanted to be inside me, Zack-san.”

“Giiiihh—!! Damned monster, go to hell!”

Fighting back the pain, Zack drew his shortsword as he shouted at her. Then, he forcefully stabbed at Solution’s pretty face, and her body quivered.

“Take that!”

However, Zack immediately realized that he had been far too hasty.

What good would stabbing the surface of a lake with a shortsword do? It would merely make more ripples, and that was what happened.

Solution turned to look at Zack, still with a short sword sticking out of her face, and then she gently said:

“I’m sorry, but I am resistant to physical attacks, so a blow like that cannot harm me. Then, I shall dissolve it.”

An acrid stench seared his nose, and within seconds, the shortsword fell from Solution’s face, its blade half-dissolved. Just as she had said, her beautiful, unmarred visage lay before his eyes.

“Who the hell are you?!”

The agony in his hand was slowly spreading up the rest of his arm, but the fear of impending death overrode his his pain, and Zack asked his question even as tears brimmed in his eyes.

However, the answer made him want to stuff his fingers in his ears to deny it.

“I am a predatory Slime. Since time is limited, I will need to swallow you up.”

Zack’s arms were pulled into Solution’s body. So forceful was the suction that Zack could not resist it, even if he were capable of doing so.

“Stop stop stop stop stop! Spare me, spare me, spare me please!”

Zack cried and begged, but the force drawing him into Solution’s body was still very strong, enough that a human being could not resist it. His arms, his shoulders, all of them were steadily devoured by her body.

“Lilia!”

With that last scream, Zack’s face was sucked into Solution’s body.

And so, Zack was swallowed whole, as though he were a python’s prey.

♦♦♦

After a few minutes had passed, there were no longer any survivors. The place was one which reeked of a foul stench.

No, one man still survived. He worked his tongue as he squatted near Shalltear’s feet, licking her high-heeled shoes clean of the brain matter which had spattered them after she had playfully crushed a bandit’s skull underfoot.

Shalltear looked on her now-cleaned heels in satisfaction.

“Well done. Then, in accordance with our agreement, I shall not take your life.”

The man, his frightened features scrunched up into a ball, looked up at Shalltear with a grateful expression on his face and kowtowed repeatedly to her in thanks. Shalltear looked lovingly upon this puppy-like man, and then snapped her fingers.

“Drain him.”

Once the two Vampire Brides came to his side, the man finally understood what those words meant.

“The undead are technically still alive, so I was not lying to you.”

The Vampire Brides bit eagerly into him, and Shalltear looked out of the corner of her eye at the man as his life-force was drained away from him. She turned to Solution — who was rearranging her messed-up collar as she emerged from the direction of the coach — and said:

“Oh, is it over?”

“Yes, I was quite satisfied. I am profoundly grateful to you for this.”

“No need to stand on ceremony. We’re all servants of Nazarick, after all. Speaking of which, did that human have fun?”

“He is currently enjoying himself. Would you like to see?”

“Hm? May I? Then, let me have a quick look.”

A man’s arm suddenly erupted from Solution’s face, accompanied by a vile stench that stung the nose. The source of the odour was that arm. Its muscles were badly dissolved after being exposed to powerful acid, and the reaction of the blood from within the muscles and the acid created gouts of thick fumes.

The arm thrashed about like it had emerged from the surface of a lake, desperately struggling to find a grip on something. Juices flowed from the exposed muscles with every twitch.

“My apologies, I did not know he was still so full of energy.”

Solution was a bizarre sight as she bowed in apology, what with the arm sticking out of her face. She then shoved the arm back into her face, smiling after the flailing arm had been completely swallowed up once more.

“It’s amazing how you can swallow a man whole and look as though nothing had happened.”

“Thank you for your praise. It is not outwardly visible because the interior of my body was originally empty. In addition, I have always been a creature like this, so this must be the effect of some sort of specialized magic.”

“Oh~ Hm, this might be a bit nosy of me, but when will he die?”

“I could secrete a stronger acid to kill him immediately if you wish, but since a human who wishes to enter me is a rare occasion, I would like to let him enjoy it for an entire day.”

“I didn’t hear any screams, did you corrode him with acid?”

“No, I did not. If I dissolved his throat with acid, he might suffocate due to being unable to breathe. Therefore, I inserted part of my body into him to suppress his voice, and it also has the effect of preventing bad smells.”

“I’m quite impressed by your attitude of paying close attention to your toys and playing with them for as long as possible. Incidentally, can you corrode specific places with your acids? For instance, only corroding a certain place?”

“Indeed, that is an easy task to accomplish. The proof of that are the scrolls, potions and other magic items within my body, and the fact that those items are intact. I could move freely even if I were to take your body within mine, Shalltear-sama, though I would have to ask that you did not move too much.”

“Predatory slimes sure are amazing… Mm. Do you want to play together next time?”

“That will be fine. Although… where do you plan to get the toys from?”

Shalltear smiled happily when she found Solution looking at the Vampire Brides behind her.

“Those girls aren’t half bad, but I want to wait until someone tries to invade us and then plead with Ainz-sama to give them to us.”

“Then, please do not forget about my share. I would like to swallow them up to the chest and expose the rest of them. That ought to be quite interesting as well.”

“Not bad. Do you get along with that interrogator?”

“Neuronist-sama? The Special Intelligence-gathering Officer? Regretfully, I cannot understand that person’s aesthetic sense.”

Shalltear planned to continue, but she was interrupted by a voice behind her.

“Solution, I’ve finished up over here. We can move out any time,” Sebas called out from the driver’s seat, having replaced the reins.

“Understood, I’m coming. Then, Shalltear-sama, though it pains my heart to leave, allow me to bid you farewell.”

Shalltear looked to Solution as she hurried back into the coach, and then to Sebas, who was seated at the driver’s place.

“Then, we shall part ways for the time being, Sebas.”

“Is that so… does this mean you have already discovered the bandits’ hideout?”

“Indeed. We shall invade them afterwards and look for any interesting people who might know something which would please Ainz-sama. Otherwise this would have all been a waste of time.”

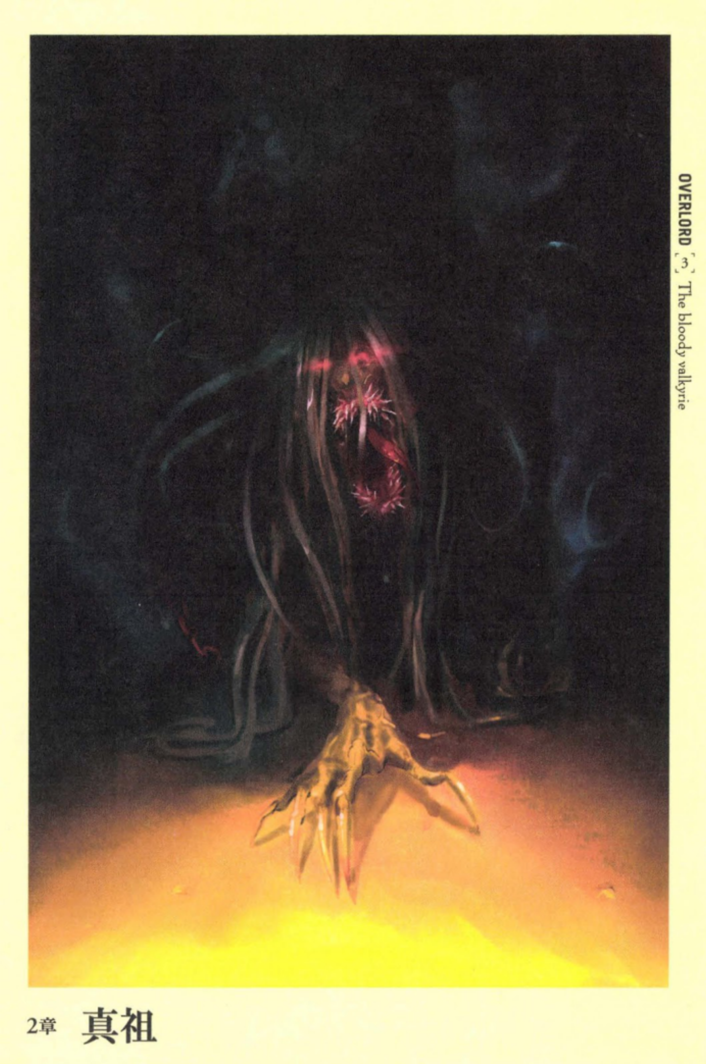
“I see. It was a pleasure travelling with you, Shalltear-sama.”

“Thank you for that. Let us meet again in Nazarick.”

“Oh, we’ll be off, then—”

# Overlord Volume 3 Chapter 2

## True Ancestor


OVERLORD [3] The bloody valkyrie
2章 真祖

*Translator: Nigel*
*Proofreader/Editor: JcqC*

## Part 1

A pair of human shapes sprinted through the forest. They were Vampire Brides, Shalltear's minions-cum-concubines.

The two of them ran at breakneck speeds along the beast-paths of the forest, as though they were trying to cut through the vegetation. The terrain was atrocious, with branches and twigs jutting out from all sides. However, their dresses were not damaged in the slightest, and the high heels they wore easily pushed them over the terrible footing as they forged ever onward.

The leading Vampire Bride carefully cradled Shalltear, while the one behind her dragged something which looked like a dried-out log.

They were not far from the place where they had parted ways with Sebas. Since they had no maps or the like, they had no idea how far they were from their destination, save that they would probably have to run a long way. However, the clanging of hard metal rang through the air, and the lead Vampire Bride immediately ground to a halt.

As the beast-path was narrow, once the person in front stopped, the person behind had to do so as well.

"Why did you stop?"

Just as the Vampire Bride in front was about to answer the question that had come from behind, she shuddered as the Mistress she was holding fixed her with a cold glare.

Pearls of cold sweat bloomed on her back, because she was deeply aware that her Mistress was not a kind or merciful person.

Shalltear, who was lounging in the Vampire Bride’s arms — in other words, in a princess carry position — stretched her legs in annoyance.

The Vampire Bride sensed what that meant and released her.

As though escaping from a cage, Shalltear somersaulted out.

With a dextrous leap, she leapt into the air, and her high-heeled feet trod the ground beneath her. The dress she wore cascaded down to cover her legs.

Once on the ground, Shalltear flipped her hair in irritation and cricked her neck.

The Vampire Brides could not help but gulp as they noticed the frigid look in Shalltear’s eyes.

“What’s going on here?”

The reason Shalltear was not running in the forest was because she felt it was a bother, and because she did not want to dirty her shoes.

There was another reason for that, but nobody here would speak it, or even think of doing so. Even in Nazarick, only a few people would dare bring it up to her face.

Since they were now transportation tools, the Vampire Brides could not stop without instructions from Shalltear. She had no use for legs which moved on their own.

Depending on the reason that they disobeyed her commands, they might end up suffering terribly.

That was the message which Shalltear's eyes carried. No, it would be a mercy if pain was all that awaited them. There was murderous intent in her previous question.

In the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the lives and deaths of everyone other than the NPCs created by the 41 Supreme Beings were at the disposal of the relevant Floor and Area Guardians. If they continued annoying Shalltear, they might be executed on the spot.

Knowing this, the Vampire Bride — who had the feeling that this might be her last will and testament — nervously began to speak:

“Forgive me, but I stepped into a bear trap.”

Shalltear looked down, and saw that the jaws of a crude metal trap had snapped shut around the Vampire Bride's slender leg.

This was not a trap designed to deal with human beings, but wild bears, which were mighty and tough creatures. It could easily shatter the ankles of any human — even one wearing greaves — who stepped into it.

Of course, Vampire Brides were very different from human beings.

Even when pierced by the bear trap spikes, which were used to hobble animals, the Vampire Bride did not feel any pain or suffer broken bones. She did not appear to have been hurt at all.

Vampire Brides could resist damage from just about any physical damage apart from that inflicted by weapons made of silver or certain other special materials, or magic weapons bearing specific enchantments. Fortified with this damage reduction, there was no way that a simple steel bear trap could possibly injure her.

Still, while she was immune to its damage, the beartrap had fulfilled its other purpose of impeding their movement.

Since the trap was not coated in poison, it was clear that it was not intended to kill its prey. Its purpose was to impede its targets, slowing the opposition down by forcing them to deal with a casualty (burden).

Shalltear remained silent, but shook her head as though to say “it can’t be helped”.

“Get out of it, then.”

“Yes! At once!”

Upon hearing Shalltear’s command, the Vampire Bride reached out with her slender hands and promptly pulled apart the jaws of the trap. Unable to resist a strength which exceeded that of a bear, the trap gave its prey up.

The sight of a beautiful girl prying open a bear trap seemed surreal but anyone who knew the strength of a Vampire Bride would not find it strange.

“Still, the fact that there’s a trap here suggests we’re close to our destination. I thought we were still quite far away.”

“Yes, please wait a moment.”

Following that, the Vampire Bride at the rear dumped the log-like object she was carrying on the ground.

It was a human corpse, desiccated and mummified. However, she had not been carrying an ordinary cadaver. It possessed a false life, which it showed as it stirred into stiff activity.

Its arms resembled withered branches sprouting sharp claws, and points of crimson light glowed in its empty eye sockets, like a Vampire’s. Abnormally sharp canines gleamed within its half-open mouth.

This was a monster called a Lesser Vampire.

It was all that remained of the bandit who had been exsanguinated by the Vampire Brides.

“Tell me, are we close to your hideout?”

The Lesser Vampire nodded deeply to its mistress, making a sound that was somewhere between a groan and a moan.

“—He says so, Shalltear-sama.”

“Is that so? Then why aren’t there any traps linked to them?”

In addition to the beartraps, there should have been alarm bells and so on. However, they had not found any such traps.

Shalltear looked around, probably checking to see if anyone was hiding nearby. The Vampire Brides began a visual search as well, until their mistress shook their head to indicate that they should stop.

“...Well, forget it. It’s not like you have any detection abilities anyway...”

As they heard those mumbled words, the Vampire Brides realised why they had been forgiven.

The Vampire Brides — their mistress included — did not possess any trapfinding skills, which was why they had been allowed to live after failing to detect the beartrap. Perhaps their mistress felt that it was illogical to mete out punishment for failing to do something they could not have succeeded at in the first place..

“If I’d known, I would have borrowed that girl for this.”

Solution had levels in assassin-type classes, and with her thief skills she could have easily discovered those traps.

“Meh, there’s no point griping about something you don’t have. Then, let’s hurry up to the bandits’ lair.”

♦♦♦

Soon, they had reached the sellswords’ hideout. Though they were still in the forest, the trees were growing thin, and beyond this place there were no more trees, only an overgrown field littered with rocks.

This terrain was known as a karst.

There was a large hole in the center of a bowl-like depression, from which faint rays of light streamed out. Judging by the angle of the light, there must be a sloping path leading downward.

There were two shapes near the cave entrance. It was evident at a glance that they had been deliberately positioned there.

They were round wooden barricades reaching up to the height of a man’s belly, though they were otherwise unremarkable. They were little more than a pile of wooden logs, but there was a sentry on each side.

It would seem the intention was to use the logs as cover from ranged attacks, so they could protect themselves if the enemy fired on them with bows and get inside to warn their comrades.

Under normal circumstances, launching a frontal attack from this distance would allow the bandits to prepare their weapons and send reinforcements from the cave. Also, all the rocks which were big enough for intruders to hide behind had already been moved away, in order to prevent a stealth approach.

In addition, there were large bells on the sentries' shoulders. Even if they were somehow downed by a sneak attack, the sound of the bells would alert their friends to the presence of enemies.

One could say that it was quite well thought out.

This situation was insoluble by purely physical means, but there was a way past it.

That was by using magic.

After casting a [Silence] spell, the attackers could kill them all in one go. Alternatively, they could use [Invisibility] to hide their approach, or [Charm Person] to draw out the opposition. Destroying the bells was also an option.

As Shalltear pondered which of these methods would be the most entertaining, Shalltear realized that there was an important piece of information which she did not have.

“Is there only one entrance?”

The Lesser Vampire nodded stiffly in response to Shalltear’s question.

Shalltear smiled. It would seem that there was no need to overthink this.

This sturdy defense could be used to ward off ambushing enemies or allow one man to hold off a horde. However, Shalltear and her followers were different.

Charging straight in would not pose a problem to people who were so unimaginably powerful that they could crush humans like bugs. The only relevant consideration was if there was an exit through which the opposition could flee.

“Is that so. Then, since we’ve arrived, there’s no need to hide in the shadows. Honestly, I’m not used to that sort of skulking around anyway.”

“After all, anywhere you go is sure to shine brightly, Shalltear-sama.”

“Stating the truth hardly qualifies as flattery. You’d best think harder if you want to try sucking up to me.”

Ignoring the Vampire Bride begging forgiveness with a lowered head, Shalltear reached out and grabbed the body of the Lesser Vampire.

“I shall entrust the weighty duty of being the vanguard to you. Go, then.”

Her slender arms blurred, and the Lesser Vampire tore through the air before striking one of the sentries. Due to the spin imparted during the throw, the Lesser Vampire spun end over end several dozen times before hitting the man.

The force of the impact beggared the imagination. Not just the sentry’s head, but even his chest spurted blood in all direction.

The stench of fresh gore hung in the air, and the other man could not parse what had just happened before his eyes. All he could do was stare dumbly at his colleague’s tragic fate.

Still, this was quite an amusing sight to the thrower.

“Strike~”

“Truly magnificent, Shalltear-sama.”

The Vampire Brides applauded Shalltear, who was pumping an arm in victory. Needless to say, the Lesser Vampire had been pulverized, but the three of them did not seem troubled by that at all. That creature had never been a part of Nazarick to begin with, and had only been made for amusement. They felt nothing about how it had just been destroyed.

In addition, it had originally been a human being. Shalltear did not recall what she had promised him before.

“Now, how about the other one...”

Shalltear looked between the two Vampire Brides. They got the message and hurriedly passed her a rock which was suitable for throwing.

“Yoi-sho~”

As she heard the sound of a bell from the distance, Shalltear grabbed a rock which was slightly larger than her hand.

Her delicate hand moved with shocking speed. In the next moment, Shalltear observed the results in the distance and happily pronounced:

“Then… that would make two strikes, hm?”

Applause rang out once more.

Then, the sound of a sentry shouting about an enemy attack reached Shalltear’s ears. It would seem that another sentry had heard the sound of the bell.

As she looked inside the cave, which seemed to be getting noisier and noisier, Shalltear smiled gently before ordering:

“Then, let’s go. You, keep watch from on top of a nearby tree and make sure nobody escapes. You, take the role of the vanguard and clear a path for me. However, do tell me if you encounter anyone who’s stronger than the rest. I want to play with them.”

“Yes, Shalltear-sama.”

“Go.”

Having received her orders, the Vampire Bride stepped forward, slowly approaching the cave entrance—

—And then she vanished.

The earth collapsed — no, the earth did not collapse. She had stepped into a pit trap.

Perhaps Shalltear might have been able to avoid the trap before falling into it, but the Vampire Bride’s reactions were not enough for her to evade a trap where the earth vanished under her feet.

“Ehhhhh~”

Still, the Vampire Bride was a low-level vassal who had no particular ability to detect traps, so there was nothing to blame her for. That was why she had been forgiven earlier. Still, even if she understood why it had happened, Shalltear still made a noise of annoyance. After that, she smiled sweetly. That was not a smile born of kindness, satisfaction, or even embarrassment.

Come to think of it, she should have anticipated that they would put a pit trap in front of the cave entrance. However, it angered her that she had not seen through it, had even fallen for it. It was with a heart boiling with such emotions that she had smiled.

Shalltear Bloodfallen was a Guardian of the glorious Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. The fact that a servant of such a mighty individual had fallen for a trap like that was utterly intolerable.

A voice filled with murderous intent leaked from between Shalltear's crimson lips:

"Get out of there before I tear you to pieces."

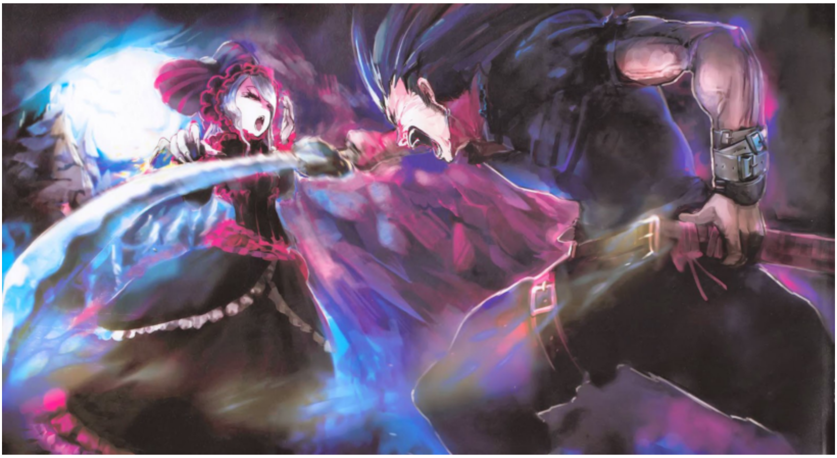
With a great leap, the Vampire Bride vaulted out of the pit and landed beside it. Though her clothes were stained by mud, there was no sign she had been hurt.

"Don't disappoint me again."

"My deepest apologies—"

"Forget it, just get in there. Unless you want me to throw you in like that trash from just now?"

As Shalltear reached out with a grabbing gesture, the Vampire Bride wailed in acknowledgement and immediately rushed into the cave. Shalltear followed leisurely behind her, strolling slowly into the cave.



## Part 2

As the clamor from outside filtered into the private room, the hand working on a weapon paused, and a pair of ears pricked up.

There was the sound of fighting, people running, and some screams mixed in.

They had been attacked, but there was still no idea of the attackers' numbers and their abilities. This was despite being trained to loudly shout that information when an attack came.

He could still hear something. This might have been a private room, but it was within a cave and had only a curtain in place of a door. The only thing separating this place from the entrance was distance, and while the curtain was thick, sound could still get in.

There were close to 70 people in the mercenary band known as the Death-Spreading Brigade. They were not as strong as him, but they were still grizzled veterans.

A raid by a small number of men would not cause such chaos. With that in mind, it might be reasonable to deduce that a large force had descended upon them. However, that did not explain why there was no sound of a great host outside, and the enemy did not feel that numerous.

“Then… could they be adventurers?”

That might explain this strange feeling of attackers who were few in number and possessed great fighting power.

He slowly rose to his feet, hanging his weapon at his waist. He put on a chain shirt, which did not take much time to don. Then, he attached a leather pouch with several potion bottles to his belt and tied it in place. Since he was already wearing his enchanted necklace and rings, his preparations were now complete.

He flung aside the curtain before stepping onto a central path within the cave.

Countless lanterns hung at evenly-spaced intervals on the walls, each glowing with a [Continual Light] spell. It was bright enough that one could scarcely believe they were in a cave.

The light illuminated his entire body.

He was tall, but not skinny. The body beneath his clothes was as solid as steel. He had not honed his physique through strength training, but through live battles.

His hair was sloppily cut and thus looked uneven. It looked quite messy. His brown eyes stared keenly forward, and the corner of his mouth was curled up in the beginning of a sneer. His chin was overgrown with stubble that looked like mildew.

Although he appeared quite slovenly, his movements were nimble and graceful, like those of a beast.

As this man arrived at the entrance which was under attack, another man burst in from the other direction. He seemed quite familiar — he was a sellsword from the Brigade. As the mercenary saw him, a look of triumph blossomed on his face.

“What happened?”

“The enemy’s attacking, Brain-san!”

The bitterly smiling man — Brain — responded:

“I know the enemy is attacking. What I want to know is how many are there? Who are they?”

“Yes! There’s two of them, both women.”

“Women? Only two of them? Could it be… Blue Rose, hm.”

Brain tilted his head in what seemed like puzzlement, and then he strode out toward the cave entrance, through which the clamor poured.

The strongest adventurer team in the Kingdom was called “Blue Rose”, and it was composed of five women. At that time, Brain they counted an old lady among their number. She and Brain had exchanged blows, and both sides had come away covered in wounds. He had also heard that the strongest assassin in the Empire was apparently a woman.

Powerful women were not exactly a rarity. Although women had weaker bodies than men, magic could easily cover that gap.

And of course, if someone with powerful physical abilities was augmented with equally powerful magic, the result would be invincible.

Respect welled up in Brain for these opponents, who stood as few against the many. His blood boiled in his chest, a battle-lust which resembled a hunger to do battle with mighty opponents.

“Hm, there’s no need for you to come over. Just make sure you guard the inside well.”

After giving the sellsword his orders, Brain strode forth, toward an unknown yet powerful foe.

♦♦♦

His full name was Brain Unglaus.

Originally, he had been nothing more than an unassuming farmer.

However, he was possessed of a natural gift, which was a talent for swordsmanship. With the aid of this talent, he was practically invincible as long as he had a weapon in hand. On the battlefield, he had not taken any wounds more severe than a scratch, and he could be described as a fighting genius.

Having never known defeat in swordsmanship, he walked an eternal path of victory.

Nobody, not even himself, had doubted this. But the Kingdom's royal martial tournament had changed the course of his life.

At first, he had not joined to win. He had simply intended to let the entire Kingdom know of his prowess. His aim had been to leave everyone crushed at his feet. However, he could barely believe the result of that tournament.

Defeat—

For the first time since he had picked up a weapon — no, for the first time in his life, he had been defeated.

The man who defeated him was Gazef Stronoff. He was now the Kingdom's Warrior-Captain, and the mightiest warrior in the surrounding nations.

Before they faced each other, the two of them had swiftly cut a swathe through their respective divisions. However the intense battle between them used up all the time they had saved.

In the end, Gazef had seized victory with the move called the [Fourfold Slash of Light]. The tale of that struggle was immortalized in song and story. In addition, the ascension of the lowborn Gazef to the position of the Warrior-Captain was proof of how spectacular that battle had been. Even the nobles who detested him could not dismiss him as a weakling.

Though the winner was covered in glory, Brain — the loser — felt as though all his efforts up to that point had gone up in smoke. However, Brain had also learned that the dream of becoming the strongest in the world was not one that only he possessed. It would seem his perspective had been too limited.

After retreating into himself for over a month, Brain broke through the despair that would drive anyone to drink, and pulled himself together.

He refused employment offers from several nobles, having decided for the first time in his life to strengthen himself.

He trained ceaselessly, honing both his skills and his body.

He learned about magic and furthered his knowledge.

The genius now applied himself like a scholar.

Defeat had only made Brain stronger.

He did not want to work for nobles because he did not want his talents to rot away. One needed sparring partners when practicing the martial arts. Mere discussions of theory were not enough. In addition, there were vocations that allowed him to fight often and earn a good wage.

He did not choose the profitable path of the adventurer because adventurers did not have many chances to kill people. Of course, they fought a lot of monsters, but Brain’s ultimate goal was to defeat Gazef. With that in mind, he had to train himself by fighting other humans.

Within this limited range of options, Brain chose to join the Death-Spreading Brigade. Granted, they were only a band of sellswords, but any mercenary company would do.

He had only one aim in mind.

That was to wipe away his earlier shame and avenge his defeat with victory.

In order to achieve this aim, he needed greater skills. Brain was willing to sacrifice anything for a weapon that matched his skills.

Magical weapons were very expensive, but he did not seek something as simple as a magic weapon.

In the south, far from the Kingdom, there was a city in the desert. Stories of blades that carved steel like mud came from there, weapons which were far superior to weakly enchanted magic weapons even without any enchantments of their own. Such swords commanded staggering prices, enough to make one’s eyeballs pop out when one heard of them. Those weapons were what Brain wanted.

And in the end, he finally obtained a 「Katana」.

Currently, Brain’s abilities had reached their limit. He was quite confident that he could defeat anyone easily, even if his opponent was Gazef. Even so, he did not allow that to get to his head, but continued training himself without fail.

Every time he closed his eyes, he saw that scene again.

He saw that scene from the martial tournament, that beautiful battle with Gazef. He had evaded that strike of his which nobody had been able to avoid, and responded with four simultaneous slashes.

With no way to imagine himself in defeat, all he could see was the noble form of the man who had beaten him, branded into his mind.

♦♦♦

Brain walked to the entrance of the cave, and the faint smell of blood greeted his nose. The screams had stopped. That meant that all his comrades near the entrance had been slaughtered. Only about two or three minutes had passed.

There should have been at least ten sellswords at the entrance. Their orders were to hold fast, to buy time for the others to gird themselves for war. But to think someone had killed all these mercenaries in so short a time—

“If there’s only two intruders, that means their abilities must be around the same level as mine.”

Brain smiled coldly.

As he walked easily forward, he downed a potion from the pouch on his waist. The incredibly bitter liquid flowed down his throat and into his belly. He quaffed another bottle, and—

A wave of heat expanded from his guts, flowing into every corner of his body. In response to that heat, he could hear his muscles bulging and tightening.

This rapid muscle augmentation was the result of the magic contained within the potion.

The first magic potion he had drunk contained had the effect of a

[Lesser Strength] spell, followed by one which bestowed [Lesser Dexterity] upon him.

There was no need to ingest the potions. They would work as long as a certain amount of the liquid made contact with his body. However, Brain felt that they would be more effective when drunk, rather than applied. Of course, that might have just been a whim of his, but whims like that sometimes gave rise to surprising power.

After that, he anointed his katana with an oil. Said oil left a faint bluish-white glow on his blade, before vanishing as it was absorbed into the metal. That oil bestowed the effects of a [Magic Weapon] spell upon his weapon, temporarily enchanting his sword with magic and increasing its sharpness.

“Activate 1, Activate 2.”

In response to those command words, a subtle wave of magical power spread out from Brain’s necklace and ring to envelop his body.

The Necklace of Eye was a necklace which protected one’s ability to see, granting blindness resistance, darkvision, flash compensation and other effects. There was no point in a warrior having the best weapon if he could not hit with it, after all. A common adventurer tactic was to rob a foe of their vision and finish them off with ranged weapons from a distance. The fact was that Brain had suffered that sort of treatment at the hands of adventurers before obtaining this necklace.

After that, he activated an item which could both store and release low-tier spells, the Ring of Magic Bind. The spell it released was one reduced energy damage, [Lesser Protection Energy].

If there were really only two attackers, then it was worth fully preparing himself to face them. It would be too late to regret not having made the proper preparations afterwards.

With that, he was ready.

He took several deep breaths, expelling the intense heat brewing within his body.

As he was now, Brain — his body enhanced by various effects — was a swordsman who stood at the peak of humanity. He was absolutely confident in his fighting ability, and a savage grin bloomed on his face.

*Now that I've prepared myself, I hope you'll show me a good time.*

♦♦♦

The further he advanced, the stronger the scent of blood became—

Two shapes appeared before him.

“Oi oi, it looks like the two of you had a lot of fun.”

“Hardly. I don’t know if it’s because these people are too weak, but they’re not filling up the Blood Pool.”

The response to Brain’s unhurried entrance was that casual line. It might have been because the opposition knew Brain would come at them directly. On his part, Brain had no intention of hiding himself, so perhaps that reaction was only to be expected.

As he looked on the intruders before him, Brain slightly wrinkled his brow.

*I was told there were two women, but one’s little more than a little girl, and they’re in dresses…?*

Still, Brain cast aside those thoughts, because above the head of that unimaginably beautiful girl hovered an orb that seemed to be made of fresh blood.

“Don’t think I’ve seen that spell before… are you two magic casters?”

Both of them wore dresses, garments that were unsuitable for combat. However, if they were magic casters, he could understand why they did not wear armor.

“I am a divine magic caster who venerates the First of the Blood, the Divine Ancestor Cainabel.”
(TL Note: It’s 神祖カイン アベル, where the 神 implies that he is a god. Also Brain mispronounces it.)

“The ‘Shin-sow Kine-able’? Never heard of him before, is he some sort of evil deity?”

“That is correct, but he was defeated by the Supreme Beings. Apparently, he was just a ‘weak event boss’, or something. One would expect nothing less of the Supreme Beings."

Brain looked away from the muttering girl and turned his eyes to the woman that looked like a follower. That woman was also a beauty, with full, upthrust breasts, wreathed in an erotic musk that titillated the senses.

Her white dress was flecked in crimson spots. That implied she was the vanguard.

Brain relaxed his shoulders, and then gripped the hilt of his sword.

“Forget it, I’m ready. I can wait for you if you’re not, how about it?”

The girl looked at Brain in surprise. Then she covered her mouth and laughed quietly.

“How brave. Will you really be alright by yourself? I don’t mind if you call all your friends over.”

“There’s no amount of small fry which can hurt you, right? Then I’ll be plenty enough.”

“It can’t be helped if you don’t know how high the stars are, right? Childish thoughts like being able to touch the stars by reaching out for them are best left for a girl with childish sentiments like Aura. They’re disgusting when you hear them coming from an adult.”

“And why can’t such a person exist? What would a little girl like you know about a man’s dreams?”

Brain raised his blade, levelling its tip at the two of them. As she saw this, the girl looked boredly at the ceiling, then forward, and then—

“Get him.”

The girl raised her chin, and the woman charged.

Her movements were swift as the wind — however, even if she moved like the wind, Brain could still cut her easily.

“Chestooo!”

As he shouted, Brain brought his katana down with a forceful swing. Filled with a power that could split an armored warrior bodily in two, it raced through the air like a hurricane.

“Kuh!”

“Hmph, that was too shallow, huh?”

Counter-attacked mid-charge, the woman leapt away as she pressed her hand against her chest. The cut started from her left shoulder and ran across her breasts.

Brain frowned as he stared at his foe.

Part of it was because he could not finish her off in a single strike, but there was something else Brain did not understand. That something was why the woman’s shoulder was not bleeding. Her blood should have been spurting out, under normal circumstances.

*Could it be magic?*

As that thought ran through Brain’s mind, he saw what was happening to the wound under the woman’s hand, and he narrowed his eyes.

The shoulder wound was slowly healing up. He had heard of certain healing spells which worked quickly, but this did not feel like one of them. That being the case, there was only one answer.

His opponent was a monster with powers of regeneration. Her sharp canines were exposed and her red pupils were filled with hostility. She looked almost the same as a human being...

As he pondered these facts, Brain finally deduced the true identity of the monster.

“A vampire… no? Special abilities include… fast healing, mystic eyes of charming, life drain, creating spawn through blood drain, weapon damage resistance, cold resistance? There should also be… ah, forget it.”

There was no need to bother with the rest. With that, he gripped his katana’s hilt once more.

The woman’s eyes went wide, and her red pupils seemed abnormally large.

In that moment, a fog suddenly clouded Brain’s mind, and he felt favorably disposed toward the enemy before him. However, he dispersed the fog with a quick shake of his head.

“...Mystic eyes, huh? My will isn’t weak enough to be affected by that sort of thing alone.”

Having drawn his sword, Brain’s heart was like a sword as well, cleaving effortlessly through regular mind-control.

The Vampire Bride bared her fangs to frighten him, but that attempt at intimidation was tinged by her own fear. If she felt that she was stronger, then all she would need to do was charge him without bothering with the scare tactics. In other words, she felt that she needed to be wary of him after his counterattack, or perhaps it was because she felt he was a strong opponent.

“Pretty smart. Still, a beast making a decision like that is little more than instinct…”

Brain slowly advanced on the Vampire Bride, who steadily retreated in time with his movements.

Brain scoffed in boredom. The Vampire Bride seemed to think her opponent was taunting her and so she ceased her backwards motion, but instead stepped forward.

The two of them were roughly three meters apart; a distance the Vampire Bride could cover in a single bound. Even so, she did not pounce him, because she feared Brain’s abilities. And then— the Vampire Bride smiled and extended a hand.

“[Shock Wave].”

A shockwave rippled through the air towards Brain. Given that this spell could easily dent a suit of full plate armor, it would severely injure Brain — who wore only a chain shirt — if it struck him. In addition, landing that single spell could change the course of this battle, given the difference in the fundamental physical attributes of both parties.

However — the Vampire Bride's eyes went wide in surprise.

"Smile after you hit, unless you want me to see through your attack."

—He was unharmed.

Brain's mocking laugh rang out after easily avoiding the invisible shockwave. The Vampire Bride panicked and stepped back. Originally, she had believed humans to be an inferior species and had looked down on him. However, the look of her face was now one of shock as her assumptions had been disproven.

Brain did not show it on his face, but he knew he had to change his tactics now, because he had not expected his enemy to use magic as well.

Brain's target was the man called Gazef. He desired to cross swords with him. Therefore, his knowledge of magic was not as great as his knowledge of blades. He did not know the mysteries of magic and had no idea what kind of tricks his opponent would pull next.

In the end, the two of them ended up staring at each other.

The girl standing at the sidelines was displeased by this deadlock, and could no longer hide her annoyance.

“Eh, tag out.”

The girl snapped her finger, and the crisp, clear sound made the Vampire Bride’s body shudder.

Brain remained still as he watched the Vampire Bride look away.

It was a perfect chance to attack, but Brain did not do so. He shifted his attention from the Vampire Bride facing him to the girl.

She was petite, though the fact that her breasts were full and bulbous seemed quite out of place on her skinny body. Her delicate arms looked fragile enough that Brain felt he could break them if he exerted his full strength.

There were many kinds of divine magic casters. Perhaps she was not a melee-oriented Cleric, but a spell-oriented Priestess, or perhaps she was a Bishop, who specialized in spellcasting.

However, she was asking to tag in so she could fight in person. That implied she was confident of victory even without her vanguard. What that meant — as Brain thought about it, he smiled.

*Doesn't look like a command to a summoned creature. That means she must be a Vampire as well.*

In addition, given the girl's attitude, she must be a higher order of Vampire. Monsters' appearances often did not match their actual abilities, so it would not be strange for that little girl's body to possess higher physical abilities than the Vampire from just now. In addition, she had observed Brain's formidable combat prowess and still chosen to take the field.

In contrast, the Vampire Bride looked afraid.

*A mistress who can frighten a Vampire… Looks like she'll be a tough foe. I'll need to be on my guard.*

As he sized up the girl, Brain continued pondering her true identity.

*Speaking of a Vampire's mistress, could she be one of those legendary Vampire Lords? I heard there was one of them who earned the title of "Landfall" for destroying a nation… however, the stories also say she was wiped out by the Thirteen Heroes.*

If she had been beaten by heroes in the past, then his opponent was hardly invincible.

Brain tightened his grip on his katana's hilt, slowly shifting into an attack stance.

“I am Brain Unglaus.”

After Brain identified himself to this mighty foe, the girl reacted in a surprising way; she quirked an eyebrow at him.

Feeling somewhat uncomfortable, Brain asked the girl:

“...What is your name?”

“Ah! You wanted to know my name. Cocytus might have gotten it right away but I’ve never looked at people like that before, so it took me a while to get it. My apologies, but you should have just asked me directly.”

The girl took up the hems of her skirt and curtseyed elegantly, like a dancer at a ball.

“My name is Shalltear Bloodfallen. And the pleasure will be all mine.”

♦♦♦

That elegant curtsey was directed to a man who stood before her with a drawn blade. He was unsure if she knew she would not be attacked, or if she was confident of dealing with any attack that did come. Judging by her expression, it would seem to be the latter case — “Someone like you is nothing to be afraid of.”

—*Let me break that self-assurance of yours.*

Brain stared silently at Shalltear, his eyes keen razors that would terrify even a hardened veteran. Her calmness irritated him, but on the flip side, that expression of hers played right into Brain’s hands.

It was the arrogance of the strong.

This arrogance was one of the weapons humanity could use to defeat monsters, whose power outstripped that of human beings. In fact, Brain had played on this sort of opportunity before to defeat several monsters who were mightier than himself.

The most important thing was — he could mock them after he defeated them. After he told them, “You can look down on some people, but not others.”

“Are you not going to use martial arts?”

—Martial arts.

They were skills mastered during a warrior’s quest for martial perfection. Some people called them *ki* or some kind of aura, but they defied easy description.

In the face of a massive, towering foe, a person who had learned [Fortress] could negate the mighty blows of his opponent and stand blade to blade with him.

Someone who had learned the ability to concentrate *ki* onto his blade and swing with [Slash] could slay even the most resilient of foes in one hit.

Against heavily armored foes, the bludgeoning martial art called [Bash] came into play.

Anyone who had learned to temporarily improve their physical parameters with [Ability Boost] could seize victory through their power of their augmented bodies.

A warrior needed to anticipate all sorts of circumstances, learn various martial arts, and incorporate them all into his own strength. This went double for adventurers, who were often plunged into bizarre battle conditions.

That being the case, what about Brain?

“Hmph, I won’t need martial arts for a brat like you,” Brain responded. It was a lie, of course. He was not stupid enough to announce his ace in the hole to his opponents.

Brain exhaled slowly and lowered his stance, returning his sword to its sheath.

He was preparing for a draw cut.

His breaths became long and shallow.

He focused his mind into a single point, and in the moment where it was fully concentrated, his awareness rebounded, expanding back outward. His perceptions were on a level where he was fully aware of everything around him; sounds, the air, and other sensory phenomena. This move was one of the original martial arts that he had created — [Field].

Its range was not great, only about three meters in radius, but the martial art allowed him to perceive everything within that radius. Perhaps it might be easier to explain it as boosting his accuracy and evasion while within that area.

Combined with Brain’s honed body, this martial art possessed extraordinary power.

He was confident that he could emerge unscathed beneath a hail of arrows. In addition, his precision was such that he could cleave even a tiny grain of wheat in two.

In addition—

All living things died when weapons struck their vitals. Thus, all one needed to do was master techniques which could accurately strike said vitals.

Rather than learn a broad range of techniques, he had focused on one single goal. His goal was to strike faster than his opponent, to accurately deliver a single, fatal blow, and in the course of his studies he had innovated a second unique martial art — [Instant Flash].

That high-speed strike was swift enough to be undodgeable, but he had not stopped there.

His training after that was extraordinary, in pursuit of the peak of excellence. He must have practiced it hundreds of thousands, no, millions of times. His ceaseless use of the [Instant Flash] had caused calluses to grow on his palms, specializing them in performing the technique, and parts of his sword's hilt had been worn into the shape of his grips.

In his unending quest for perfection, he had once more birthed a new technique.

He could cut his foe so quickly that blood would not even stick to the blade. Feeling that he had reached the realm of the gods, he named that technique [God Flash].

With that move, his opponents would not even realise he had struck.

Once he combined these two martial arts, the [Field] which guaranteed a hit and the [God Flash] that struck at divine speed, there was no way anyone could avoid being slain in one blow.

His strikes were aimed at his opponents' vitals; specifically, their necks.

This was his secret move — the “Mogaribue”.

(TL Note: A mogari (虎落) is a form of bamboo fence, while the mogaribue (虎落笛) is the sound of the winter wind blowing through that fence, like a flute)

It was named for the sound his opponents' blood made when it spurted from the stump of their severed necks.

Against Vampires, there would probably be no spray of blood, but being able to sever his foe's neck probably counted as a victory.

“Are you done preparing yet?”

As she looked at Brain, who stayed silent and did nothing but breathe, Shalltear shrugged in boredom.

"I'm ready to make my move, so if you have any last words, feel free to say them~"

*Beat—*

"—Then let the trampling begin."

Shalltear strode forward with that cheerful pronouncement.

*Are you kidding me?! We'll see how calm you are after your head hits the ground.*

Brain did not say that. He felt that doing so would break his concentration and waste his effort.

Shalltear's steps were unguarded, seemingly defenseless, as dainty and casual as if she were heading for a picnic.

This was not the way a warrior moved. Brain fought the urge to grin.

He felt she was foolish, but there was no way he would go easy on her.

Brain went on to use [Ability Boost]. He was waiting for his opponent to enter his [Field], which was also his striking range, and once she did so he would attack. Arrogant monsters who thought themselves mightier than others were all like that. After all, humans were weak creatures with inferior physical abilities, and no special abilities of note.

*However, I'll teach you how dangerous it is to look down on mankind.*

Brain mused that martial arts were created to fight beings that were stronger than humans.

*— I'll finish you off in one hit.*

Haughty monsters would often struggle when pushed into dire straits. If he could not finish her off in one blow, she would probably instruct her Vampire to come help her. Then the battle would become two against one, and even Brain would be hard-pressed to hold them off.

Thus, he needed to kill her in one blow.

Brain's face was impassive, but he was laughing internally.

He laughed at his opponent's leisurely approach; perhaps she did not know that she was climbing the stairs to the chopping block.

Three more steps, two more steps.

...One more step.

And then—

*—Your head is mine!*

With that mental declaration, Brain struck with all his might.

“Hoo!”

He expelled a short, forceful breath.

His blade cleared his sheath, slicing through the air at Shalltear.

There was a single word to describe the speed of this movement — lightning. By the time one saw it, one’s head would have fallen, so quickly did it take place. After practicing millions of times, it was truly a divine flash.

*I win.*

As Brain thought that—

—He stared in shock.

The blow had missed. The strike into which he had poured his entire being had been evaded.

If that had happened, he might have been able to admit that he had met an unimaginably powerful opponent.

However—

Shalltear had caught it with her fingertips.

She had caught Brain’s lightning-fast strike.

In addition, she held his blade gently, like one would the wings of a butterfly.

Brain could not help but pant heavily, as he felt the air seem to freeze around him.

“...Im-impossible...”

Those nearly-inaudible words accompanied each gasp he made.

Brain struggled desperately to rein in the tremors within him, as the scene before his eyes utterly defied his expectations. However, it was an undeniable fact that there were two of Shalltear’s ivory fingers upon the body of his blade — her thumb and her forefinger.

More than that, she had not seized his blade from the front, but hooked her arm around the swing to catch it from behind. Without once entering the path of the strike, she had caught up with the speed of the katana — with the speed of his [God Flash].

Although she appeared to be gingerly grasping the blade, with hardly any effort at all, Brain could not budge his sword backward or forward, despite pouring the full strength of his body into his exertions. It was like yanking on a chain fastened to a stone several hundred times his own body weight.

And then, the force on his sword suddenly increased, almost throwing Brain off balance.

“Hmph, Cocytus has several of these too, but since there’s an astronomical difference between the wielders, it’s hardly worth being on guard for.”

Shalltear pulled the grasped katana before her, studying it.

As Brain understood what she had said, the inside of his head turned white.

It was a sense of despair which denied his entire life.

Even so, he pulled himself together again. That was because he had been defeated once, and just as a broken bone would knit back thicker and stronger, he had developed a resistance to the condition of defeat.

It was impossible, but he had to believe it.

He had to believe the fact that her fingers could easily seize his divinely-fast strike.

His face nearly turned pale from the weight of that shock, and Shalltear wrinkled her brows in surprise at this development.

Then, he heard something like an exaggerated sigh of disappointment.

“You understand, right? You can’t beat me without using martial arts. If you understand, please don’t hold back. Shouldn’t you go all out now?”

As those cruel words reached his ears, Brain could not help but curse:

“You damn monster—!”

As she heard him, Shalltear smiled innocently, radiant as a blossoming flower.

“Is that so. Do you finally understand? I’m a cold, merciless, cruel — and lovable monster.”

After letting go of the katana, Shalltear leapt back, to her original position, accurate to within the millimeter.

“Are you done preparing yet?”

Shalltear’s delighted smile and those words combined to make Brain’s blood boil. How much further are you going to scorn me? Instead, as Brain realised that his opponent was powerful enough that she could look down on someone like him who had reached the limits of human strength, he could not help but be afraid.

*—Should I run?*

Brain had always felt that living was the most important thing. If he was outmatched, he should run, and erase his shame at a later date. Brain felt that as long as he survived, he could claim the victory in the end, because he was sure he could get stronger in the meantime.

However, how could he flee someone whose physical abilities overwhelmed his own by such a large margin?

As though freshly awakened, Brain reconfirmed the location he was targeting.

He was aiming for her legs, to reduce his opponent’s mobility before escaping at top speed.

He would avoid the radius in which his foe had seized the strike made with all his might, and instead attack something which was harder to defend.

With that in mind, Brain turned his attention to Shalltear’s neck as he resheathed his katana. When [Field] activated, he could strike accurately even with his eyes closed, so it made sense to deceive his opponent with his eyes.

“—Let the trampling begin.”

Shalltear stepped forward once more in an exaggerated fashion.

Although he had previously expected that she would step into his [Field], it was the opposite now — he hoped that she would not enter the [Field].

*How pathetic is this,* Brain mentally chastised himself. Still, even his desire to avenge himself could not ignite his fighting spirit. It was like a fire that had run out of fuel. He tsked, and used [Field] to monitor Shalltear’s movements.

Three steps, two steps, one step—

—She was in range.

As Brain stared at Shalltear's neck, he noticed her mocking expression out of the corner of his eye.

—His target was the right ankle she was putting forward.

He swung down with his katana, using his body weight to further hasten his blow.

As he cast his stress aside, he was certain that this swing was faster than the previous one. Even he had no way of defending against a strike of that speed.

*I can do it!*

Just as he was about to slice off the girl's delicate ankle that revealed itself from beneath the hem of her skirt—

—The hilt of Brain's katana slid from his hands.

Brain's line of sight did not move, and he had no idea what had happened. However, the special sensory abilities granted to him by

[Field] made him acutely aware that his beloved katana was now on the ground, trod under a high-heeled foot.

It was impossible. Yet, it was an undeniable reality.

The reason Brain’s katana had slipped was because of the shock transmitted into his hands when that high-heeled shoe had stepped on it.

There was only one reason not to believe this.

That reason was: despite heightening his focus to its limit, he still had not sensed his opponent’s movements. Yes, not even within the [Field] of which he was so proud.

She was close enough that if she reached her hand out, she could touch him. Shalltear’s disdainful gaze landed on Brain from such a short distance. The startling pressure it generated threatened to crush the air along with Brain himself.

Brain’s breathing grew chaotic.

His sweat flowed like rain, soaking his entire body. His field of vision trembled and an intense feeling of nausea came over him.

He had been through several risky encounters before, so desperate situations were a common sight for him. However, those encounters were little more than child's play compared to his present predicament.

The high-heeled shoe pulled off the blade, and Shalltear silently leapt away.

"—Are you done preparing yet?"

"!"

The third repetition of those words filled Brain with an incomparable sense of despair.

Next, she would say "Let the trampling begin." However, just as Brain thought that would happen, he heard something completely different.

"Could it be that… you can't use martial arts?"

That voice — filled with pity and surprise — made Brain draw a sudden breath.

He could give no reply. No, to be precise, he did not know what to say. Perhaps he could playfully reply like a clown: "Ah, I used them just now, but you defeated them easily."

Biting his lower lip, Brain retrieved his katana.

“...Could it be that you’re not actually that strong? I thought you were stronger than those chaps at the entrance… Sorry about that, I measure strength in meters, so I can’t discern differences of a millimeter or two.”

He had worked so hard and so long.

During the showdown with Gazef, he was overly confident in his natural abilities, so he had not trained and lost to someone who had. As a result, his defeat had turned into his motivation.

The mindset he had developed, of standing up again from defeat — of earnestly honing his skills to produce results — were nothing but foolishness to the monster before him.

*This can’t be happening. All along, I’ve been slaying those monsters who scorned me and mocked me for being weaker than them—*

As those thoughts rose through Brain’s mind, he struggled to press them down, and in their place—

“Aaaaahhhhh—!”

With a great shout, he made his move on Shalltear. Brain swung at Shalltear — who had a puzzled look on her face as she watched him attack — with all the force his body could muster.

His blow, which marshalled all the muscles of his entire body, could easily cut an armored human being in half.

Shalltear had no intention of evading that stunning strike. The way she watched the gleaming arc of white light descending upon her made Brain think that he might be able to land a hit.

However, the scene from earlier denied those thoughts of his. Could he really strike her so easily?

In the next moment, those fears were confirmed.

As a crisp ringing filled the air, Brain once more saw an unbelievable sight.

Shalltear had swiftly flicked the nail of her left little finger — roughly two centimeters long — with blinding speed. In addition, Shalltear did not seem to be using any strength at all; the rest of her hand was balled up into a fist, leaving only the little finger sticking out; and it was slightly bent.

With that motion — which did not even qualify as toying with him — she had parried that blow which Brain had struck with all his might.

Parried that blow which could cleave full plate armor, shatter swords, and break shields—

Struggling desperately to pull together his shattered will to fight, he focused his strength into his hands which trembled from the impact of Shalltear's parry. He raised his katana high and brought it down, and then — Shalltear still casually deflected it.

"Huaaaah~"

Shalltear yawned in an exaggerated manner, even going so far as to pat her mouth with her right hand. She was intentionally staring at the ceiling now. It would seem she was no longer taking Brain seriously.

Even so.

Even so — Brain's katana had still been deflected.

By the little finger of her left hand—

"Uoooohhhh—!"

A roar issue from Brain's throat. No, it was not a roar, but a cry of despair.

Horizontal slash — parried.

Diagonal slash — parried.

Frontal slash — parried.

Diagonal cut — parried.

Vertical cut — parried.

Horizontal cut — parried.

No matter the angle, no matter the direction in which he made his attacks, all of them were deflected.

It felt as though his katana was being drawn to that nail, and in that moment Brain finally understood.

His opponent was truly powerful. Even his hard work and natural talents could not even bring him close to her feet, let alone onto her level.

“Ara~ tired already? Though come to think of it, this nail clipper’s pretty dull.”

Brain stopped swinging as he heard those surprising words.

Could one cut through a mountain with a sword? That was impossible; even a child knew that. Then, could he beat Shalltear? Any warrior who faced her would know that answer.

There was no way he could defeat her.

Human beings could not defeat entities who were beyond human imagination. If anyone was able to stand toe to toe with her, that someone must surely be a mighty individual who was beyond the realm of mankind. Regretfully, Brain was merely a warrior who stood at humanity's peak.

Indeed, no matter how hard he worked, as long as he was still a human being, he would be nothing more than an infant flailing around with a stick.

"...I… trained so hard…"

"Trained hard? What a pointless statement. I was created strong, so there was no need to train hard in order to become stronger."

Brain laughed as he heard this.

*I tried so hard, and got so far. But in the end, it doesn't even matter. How self-centered was I, thinking I was a genius?*

His legs felt heavy, like they had been squashed by huge boulders.

“...? Ahahahaha, what are you crying for? Did something sad happen?”

He understood what Shalltear was saying. However, her voice was muffled, as though it were coming from far away.

Even his determination to train himself, the determination that let him burst the blisters on his hands to continue swinging a heavy iron bar, was meaningless. Wearing heavy armor and running long distances was meaningless. Defeating monsters by himself was also meaningless.

It was all meaningless. Therefore, Brain’s life was also meaningless.

In the face of a truly puissant being, Brain was no different from the powerless weaklings he used to mock.

“I’m an idiot…”

“...Are you done? Then it’s about time to wrap this up, no?”

Shalltear giggled as she advanced on him, her little finger extended. Brain cried out; not a warrior’s call to battle, but a child’s weeping.

Brain ran wildly.

He faced his back to Shalltear.

Having experienced Shalltear’s physical ability first-hand, he expected that she would catch up with him immediately.

Still, he paid that fact no heed. Or rather, Brain no longer had the energy to worry about that sort of thing. He simply revealed his defenseless back to her, scrunching his face up into a tear- and snot-filled mess as he desperately ran deeper into the cave.

Just then, an innocent girl’s voice, laced with bloodlust, came from behind Brain.

“Are we playing tag then? You’re going to play all sorts of games with me? Then I shall enjoy myself, ahahahaha~”

## Part 3

A cold wind blew through the main hall, slipping through the gaps in the barricade and washing over the surviving men of the Death-Spreading Brigade, all 42 of them.

The main hall was the most spacious part of the cave system, so it was commonly used as a dining area. However, it was now an emergency stronghold.

This series of caves — the sellswords' hideout — was centered around this long and narrow hall. Several smaller caves radiated off along its sides, and they were used as personal rooms, armories and food storage. Therefore, if this place was taken, the other locations would also fall easily. When attacked, it thus made sense to designate this place as the linchpin of their final defensive line.

That said, it might have been called a stronghold, but it had not been built to the standards of one.

They had upended their crude tables and stacked up boxes to form a simple barricade.  After that, they had strung up several chest-height ropes between the entrance to the main hall and the barricade, in order to ward off anyone who might try to charge the barricade. Once the enemy ran into the obstacles, the defenders could avoid being drawn into a melee.

Almost everyone was arrayed behind this defensive formation, holding their crossbows as they waited in the center, left and right wings.

Even if it came to a shooting match, the dimensions of the main hall and the size of the entrance gave an overwhelming advantage to the defenders in the hall. In addition, now that they had all spread out, the attackers would end up taking fire from all the defenders no matter where they decided to attack. Even area-effect attacks would have trouble taking them out because they were spread out. This troop arrangement was designed to provide covering fire, and it was called a crossfire formation.

It was a simple battle array, but it could hold off an enemy force larger than itself.

And then, disquieted looks began appearing on the men’s faces.

As the men trembled, their chain shirts quivered along with them, producing the rustle of links sliding over other links.

The interior of the cave was cool, and quite comfortable even on summer days. However, what they felt now was not exactly coldness.

Just now, peals of laughter had rung in from the outside. Due to the echoes within the cave, it was transformed into a shrill, sexless laughter, which was what had chilled them to their bones.

They believed that since the strongest man in the Death-Spreading Brigade — Brain Unglaus — had sortied, there was no need for them to build a barricade or the like.

That laughter had shattered their conviction.

Brain was unbeatable. That was what they believed.

Brain was far stronger than an ordinary man. Even Imperial knights could not possibly defeat him. Not even monsters could. He could slay an Ogre in one hit, charge into a Goblin horde by himself and mow them down like grass. If the entire Death-Spreading Brigade crossed blades with him, he might well end up taking all their heads. What else could they call him but their strongest man?

But if such a man had been defeated, what did that mean?

The fact that someone could fight Brain and still laugh like that could only mean one thing.

Everybody knew it, but nobody dared to say it.

All they could do was look silently at each other.

The eyes of everyone gathered here went wordlessly to the entrance of the hall — in the direction of the rest of the cave.

The tension in the air thickened, and then—

The sound of running came toward them, growing louder and louder.

Someone gulped loudly. The sounds of several crossbow strings being drawn back could be heard amidst the silence.

As the sellswords watched the hall’s entrance, a man sprinted into view, panting heavily. It was a miracle that nobody had loosed their bolts at him.

“Brain!”

The man who shouted was the head of the mercenaries — the Brigade’s leader. Soon, a great cheer exploded through the hall. Their jubilant cheers came from their belief that he had defeated the intruder.

There were sounds of voices congratulating Brain, as well as those of hands patting each other on the shoulder.

They chanted Brain’s name over and over again. Amidst this praise, Brain stood at the entrance to the hall, holding his weapon in one powerless hand as he quietly surveyed the faces of the sellswords around him.

No, that was not right. His expression suggested that he was looking for something.

The cheering died down as though suppressed, as the sellswords picked up on Brain’s strange mood.

Brain ran for the barricade.

“Oi! Wait up, we’ll open up for you!”

Brain paid those words no heed as he squirmed into the barricade, forcing his way through without wasting a single moment before continuing his run.

He felt the sellswords stare dumbly at him as he opened a door. It led to a cave which was being used as a storeroom, and he rushed inside.

“What’s wrong? Did he put something in there?”

“Who knows? It feels weird, though… was he crying? Nah, that couldn’t be!”

They stuck their heads out to look at the closing door, but the mercenaries were thoroughly baffled by the strange event which had transpired before them.

Only one person here was frowning; the brigade’s leader. This was because only he — no, Brain knew as well, so that made two — had an idea of what was going on. However, he did not have the time to verify his suspicions.

The sound of slow, graceful steps drew close, followed by the slow appearance of a stranger in the entrance.

None of them had any idea who that person was. Since nobody in the band knew this stranger, it was clear that it was the intruder who had sparked this disturbance, and the commotion vanished in an instant.

Impossible. If that were really the case, that would mean that the reason why Brain was here had now taken a 180-degree turn. If the intruder was still alive, it meant that he had fled here.

In addition, there was only one intruder, its back hunched in a bizarre way.

It was not tall and looked like a girl. Her arms hung limply below her, as did her head. The strange thing was that given the position of her head and the bottom of her neck, it looked like the latter was three times longer than that of a regular human being.

She had a full head of lustrous silver hair which dragged along the ground as she slowly entered the hall. She wore an exquisitely-crafted dress, which seemed to be wreathed in darkness.

Nobody spoke.

A wave of heart-stopping cold accompanied this dreadful visage.

Her head slowly came up, her face obscured by the strands of silvery hair. Through them, they could see a pair of red lights, which slowly narrowed down to needle-sharpness.

Everyone knew what this meant — much to their misfortune.

She was laughing.

That frightening girl raised her head, revealing a beautiful face. However, nothing could be more revolting to the people who had just seen the state of her. Those elegant features looked like a mask sculpted by a top-rate artist.

“Good evening, everyone. My name is Shalltear Bloodfallen. Is this the finishing point? Does this mean the game of tag is over?”

As she spouted those bewildering lines, the girl — Shalltear — looked around. However, that beautiful face of hers wrinkled, probably because she had not found the person she was looking for. In the unbroken silence, the girl’s voice rang forth once more.

“Are we playing hide and seek nooooooooow?”

She giggled merrily, seemingly amused by this. Shalltear lowered her head and laughed and laughed and laughed, her silver hair shrouding her face.

As the sellswords gasped at the sight before them, Shalltear’s laughter grew ever louder.

“Ahahaaahahahahahaaaahahhahahahhh!!”

Her full-bellied mirth echoed through the hall as the girl slowly raised her head again.

The face they saw made the sellswords feel like their hearts were being crushed in their chests, and that ice water was filling their veins.

That face was no longer beautiful. The color flowing out of her pupils had dyed her eyes completely red, and the two neat rows of white teeth in her mouth now resembled a set of delicate syringe needles, like a shark’s gaping maw. A lewd pink glow leaked from her throat as transparent saliva drooled from her mouth.

“Ahahaaahahaahaahahaa!!!”

Shalltear bared her fangs and grinned, so wide that the corners of her mouth almost touched her ears. She laughed several dozen times, like the tolling of an off-key bell.

Whimpers of despair filled the air of the hall.

Though they were in a cavern, it seemed as though even the air could not bear it and joined in with the resounding echoes.

—A girl?

—A monster?

—A fiend?

It was none of them.

This was terror incarnate—

Despite the distance between them, they could scent blood on her breath. Due to the intensity of the stench, it seemed as though even the air was turning red.

“Uwaaaaaah—!”

Overcome by panic, one of the sellswords screamed and depressed the lever on his crossbow.

The bolt tore through the air and embedded itself deep into Shalltear’s chest. The impact made her waver slightly.

“—Loose!”

Upon hearing their leader’s voice, the sellswords came to their senses, chased away their fear, and fired their crossbows as one.

The bolts which shot out roared like a downpour, riddling Shalltear's body with projectiles.

Of the 40 bolts fired, 31 of them had hit, each piercing deeply into her body. At this range, the bolts could even go through metal armor, so this was the logical outcome.

In addition, the four which had entered her head would have been fatal for a human being.

Someone breathed, "We killed it…"

Those words were the hope which all of them were clinging to. Although their foe was still standing, so many bolts stuck out of it that it resembled a porcupine. By common sense, it should have been definitively dead.

Still, while that thought filled their minds, the smoking cinders of fear within their hearts could not be extinguished.

As though driven by some acute sixth sense, the sellswords began reloading their crossbows.

And then — Shalltear moved.

Like a conductor preparing to direct a performance, she slowly spread her arms. The bolts which covered her body began working their way out and then fell to the ground. None of them had so much as a single drop of blood on them, nor were their heads dented. It was as though they had never been used at all.

Shalltear laughed, and a vile, predator's snarl appeared on her face.

Scattered cries of terror rose from the frightened sellswords. As though urged on by those cries, countless bolts ripped through the air toward Shalltear once more.

The numberless projectiles impaled her eyeballs, pierced her throat, penetrated her abdomen and sank into her shoulders. Yet the girl who had met such a grisly fate merely seemed annoyed, as though she had been caught in a drizzle.

“It’s uselesssssssss~ But you still try so haaaaaaarrrrrrd~”

She took a step forward, and then — she leapt.

The ceiling was about five meters above the cave floor. The girl jumped high enough to reach out and touch it easily. She sailed gracefully through the air and landed on the other side of the barricade. As her high heels clacked on the ground, all the bolts stuck in her fell off as well.

She turned to look at the soldiers behind her, who were reloading their crossbows.

She stepped forward — and punched.

She did not even put her back into it. It was a simple, casual punch. That said, it was possessed of extraordinary speed and its destructive power was out of this world.

Her hand pierced the body of the sellsword she had punched, sending him flying into the barricade. With a heaven-shaking crash, the wood of the barricade disintegrated, spraying splinters everywhere.

Only the silence of wood chips falling to the ground could be heard in the silence that filed the hall.

The stunned sellswords stopped reloading their crossbows, staring dumbly at Shalltear.

Shalltear stuck her index finger into the mass of blood floating above her and drew out a strand of blood, which turned into a character before her. It looked like a Sanskrit character or a similar symbol, and it was called a Magic Rune.

Shalltear possessed a class called Blood Drinker, and this was one of its skills: Blood Pool. This orb of enchanted blood could store the blood of victims for various purposes. It could also drain mana from the blood, so one could use skills that augmented spells without consuming extra MP.

“[Penetrate Magic - Implosion].”

After casting this 10th tier spell — which was of the highest tier of magic — the bodies of ten mercenaries began swelling up from inside.

There was no time for them to cry out. All they could do was watch their bodies expand inexorably, looks of ignorant terror on their faces. Then, in the next moment, their bodies burst, like balloons popping.

“Hahahahhhahahaahaha! Firewoooooorks! How prettyyyyyyyy~”

Shalltar pointed to the spraying blood, applauding and cackling as she did.

“Uooohhhhh!”

Following that cry, an estoc impaled Shalltear’s chest from behind — piercing her heart. It sawed up and down, as though to widen the wound.

“Die, you monster!”

The broadsword swing after that nearly clove Shalltear's head in half, its point stopping after it pierced her left eye.

"You lot, hurry up and get stuck in!"

As wails and cries rose from them, three mercenaries hacked at Shalltear's body with the weapons they had at hand.

They swung over and over again, but Shalltear still stood firm, despite having a broadsword buried halfway into that face of hers. Said face bore a frightening smile, with no sign that she was in pain at all.

After they tired of attacking her, the sellswords cast down their swords and switched to punching and kicking her, the tears streaming down their faces. Though they were much larger than she was, Shalltear remained unmoved. It was as though the sellswords were assaulting a huge boulder.

Shalltear tilted her head to look at the mercenaries and began thinking. Then she clapped her hands together, having thought of some devilish scheme.

"Hahaha, hahaha, hahahahaha!"

She exhaled, as though expelling the heat from within her. The thick stench of gore made the people around her nauseous.

Shalltear carelessly wrenched out the broadsword stuck in her head. Once it was gone, there was no sign that she had ever been wounded in the first place.

Just as she was about to swing it, she halted halfway. Rust covered the broadsword, and it slowly crumbled away. In her blood-addled mind, she thought about a penalty from one of her job classes — Cursed Knight — and she tossed it away in a vaguely disappointed manner. Then, she casually flicked one of those delicate ivory hands of hers.

And thus, three skulls rolled to the ground.

“Run away! Run away! Run for your lives!”

“We can’t beat a monster like that!”

The sellswords screamed and fled in all directions.

Having lost all will to fight, one of the running men was seized from behind by Shalltear, who grasped his head with both her hands and squeezed. His head popped open like a shellfish having its carapace cracked open, and his brains squirted out.

“Hahahahahahahahaha! Whaaaaat’s that look on your faces, are you scaaaaared~? Wait a minute, hahahahahaha! Hang on a bit, I’m iiiiiiiitttt—! Hahaha, hahaha, hahahahaha!”

Their curiosity piqued by that sinister voice, the sellswords turned to see a stomach-churning sight. The blood-drunk queen of nightmares chased them down, not allowing a single mercenary to escape.

One of the fleeing men stumbled, rolling beneath Shalltear’s feet.

“Spare me! Please! I won’t do anything bad again!”

As she looked on the man, crying and whimpering for mercy as he grabbed her leg, Shalltear’s face split into a predatory grin. The sellsword immediately understood what that smile meant and his face turned an ashen gray.

“—So hiiiiiiiiiiiiiigh uuuuuuppppppp~”

“Noooo! Stop—!”

Still clutching her leg, the man was lifted bodily into the air. With one hand clutching his back, she threw him lightly at the ceiling.

Unable to resist her supernatural arm-strength, the mercenary finally let go and squeezed his eyes shut. After a brief period of weightlessness, he felt the pull of gravity dragging him down again; and then his hand struck the ground, sending a gout of pain through his body.

“Waaaaaah!”

Being able to feel pain was proof that he was still alive. The mercenary, grateful for being able to escape death, eased his eyes open ever-so-slightly, and then he realized that he had been celebrating too soon. This was because Shalltear’s slender ivory-white hands had gently embraced him, not allowing him to fully touch the ground.

He had not escaped from the clutches of this terrifying monster.

No, not just that — a gaping maw opened before him, looking like a lump of clotted blood, radiating a stench he had never encountered before.

“Hahaha, hahaha, how fuuuuuuuuun~ Did you really think you could die so easilyyyyyyyyy~ Noooooooooope~” she said as she stuck her tongue out at him.

“Spare, spare me—”

“Noooooooooope— I haven’t fed in soooooooooo looooooong~”

Her mouth opened until it was past her ears, until it was big enough to gulp an entire skull down.

◆◆◆

Nobody here knew this.

Nobody here knew that the monsters called True Ancestors in the DMMORPG YGGDRASIL were physical incarnations of disaster.

The mouth that opened to the height of her ears was in a semi-circular shape, and the two canines within it were long enough that they reached her chin. Her brilliant scarlet eyes were the color of blood, and the fingertips of her dried-wood arms sprouted claws that were about ten centimeters long. She looked like she was hunched over whenever she moved, and leapt at her prey in a flying charge.

That was the the posture she had.

Vampires were monsters which were crossbreeds of humans and bats, and the high-tier Origin Vampires looked more monstrous than the others.

The only Vampire-type monsters which could be said to be beautiful were Shalltear's concubines, the Vampire Brides.

The only reason why Shalltear the True Vampire looked so beautiful was because her guild member who designed her was skilled at drawing and turning his art into reality.

Shalltear’s current appearance was her original look as a True Vampire. In other words, her usual appearance was merely a sham.

♦♦♦

Like a rubber toy, or a bloated, disgusting leech, Shalltear gnawed at the sellsword’s throat.

It was not clear if the sellsword first felt dozens of needles pierce his throat, or if he heard the gross sound of his blood being drained away in an instant.

The man felt his very existence being siphoned away, and the chilling dread of that realization instilled a terror in him which he had never felt before.

However, even as he tried to struggle, his limbs grew heavy and his eyesight darkened.

After draining him dry, Shalltear tossed aside the dessicated corpse, licking off a stray drop of blood with a moist, gleaming tongue. Then, she smiled brightly at the other sellswords, who did not know if they should flee.

“Sooooooooo~ maaanyyyyy~ mooooooore~ snaaaaaacks~ for meeeeeeee~”

Countless screams of anger and cries of despair echoed through the great hall—

♦♦♦

Shalltear grinned evilly as she stood within the silent hall which was now devoid of any movement. The orb of blood above her head had absorbed a lot of fresh gore, to the point where it was only a little smaller than her head.

“Thaaaaaaat waaaaas fuuuuuuuuuun~”

After hearing Shalltear’s exclamation of delight, the Vampire Bride — who had been stationed at the hall’s entrance to prevent anyone from escaping — lowered her head and added:

“I am glad that you enjoyed yourself, my noble master.”

“Time for the maaaaaaiiiiiiin diiiiiishhhh~”

Shalltear wrenched open the door to the storeroom into which Brain had fled, bursting the lock off. The hinges still hung from the door in Shalltear’s hand.

The storeroom was cramped, with several bags and boxes within.

It was here that Shalltear smelled something surprising — fresh air, scented with dust, the aroma of the wind from outdoors. At the same time, the spoor of a human grew fainter. Shalltear might have lost herself in her Blood Frenzy, but she still remembered the mission assigned to her.

“Kuwaaaaaaah—!”

With a furious roar, Shalltear shoved away the obstacles in her path, and advanced to the place from which the wind blew.

She found a hole behind the boxes, which had been blocked up by sandstone less than a meter ahead. The fresh air flowed in from a gap in the rock.

“An escaaaaaaaape tunneeeeeellllll—?!”

The Lesser Vampire had not been lying — he did not know there was an escape passage here.

A problem one often ran into with the use of magical charms was that one could only learn what the subject already knew. The target could not give answers which they did not have, and if they believed a falsehood to be the truth, then the questioner would only learn the falsehood.

Unlike Mare, Shalltear did not have any magic to move the earth, If she tried to clear it with a shockwave, it might drop the entire ceiling on them.

*He had escaped.*

Those words floated to the fore within her bloodsoaked thoughts. To some extent, Shalltear understood that she had failed in her part of the mission.

Shalltear snarled in anger.

Why was this pitiful insect of a human being not moving in accordance to the wishes of Shalltear, a Guardian of Nazarick?

*All I want is to turn your unnecessary lives into a feeble contribution to the glory of Nazarick; why don't you understand and rejoice in that fact?*

Shalltear ground her teeth, and then the Vampire Bride who had been assigned to lookout duty called out from behind her.

"—Shalltear-sama!"

The fact that one of her Vampire Brides had left her post incensed Shalltear, and her vision turned red as she briefly entertained the idea of killing her. In the end, she managed to bank the flames of her wrath with great effort. If she had left her position for an important matter, then she should be spared.

“Whaaaaaaat — *is* iiiiiiiiiit?”

“Several people are headed this way.”

“Hm~ Leftover survivooooooooors~? Theeeeeeen~ let’s go out and meet theeeeeeeeeem—! Ahahaha, hahaha, hahahahaha!”

## Part 4

Shalltear leapt up, and like a little bird flitting through the night, she hopped over the log barricade at the cave entrance. The Vampire Brides which accompanied her slowly advanced forward.

Shalltear looked on her targets with a smile.

They were a disciplined, well-trained party.

The frontliners comprised three male warriors, each equipped with different gear, but all of them had on a hauberk of scale armor, with a weapon in hand and a large shield on their backs.

Behind them was a red-haired female warrior in banded armor.

There was a lightly-dressed man holding a staff in the rear. He was probably an arcane magic caster. Beside him was a divine magic caster who wore a cleric’s robe over his armor and had a holy symbol shaped like a flame around his neck.

There were six of them in total, and although they were surprised at the sight of Shalltear as she emerged from the cave, they calmly went on alert, a movement born of accumulated experience.

“That’s gooooooood~”

Although it was not bad to slaughter weak humans, who had the consistency of tofu, more resilient opponents like this were more interesting.

WIth a look of anticipation in her crimson eyes, Shalltear directed a predatory grin at the people before them.

“Speak!”

Shock appeared on the face of the arcane magic caster, but only for a moment, and then his expression hardened.

“Enemy: probable Vampire! Only silver or magic weapons effective! Unbeatable opponent! Fighting withdrawal! Don’t look at her eyes!”

—A cry rang forth, easily audible by anyone in this depression.

The shouted commands had been pared down to the bare minimum, and everyone swiftly reacted to them. The warrior at the lead unlimbered his large shield and took a defensive stance. He averted his eyes, looking instead at Shalltear’s chest and belly.

During this time, the female warrior behind them had taken up the weapon passed to her by the warrior in front and began applying something to it.

An unpleasant odor wafted into Shalltear’s nose.

It was alchemical silver.

This was a sticky salve made by alchemists. The magical substance spread across the weapon when applied, coating it in a thin membrane and making it function as though it were made of silver.

Weapons made of silver were not only more expensive than regular weapons, but they were softer than steel and not suitable for long-term use. Therefore, many adventurers purchased salves like this and applied them to their weapons when the need arose, allowing them to temporarily take on the properties of silver.

Wielding weapons which now radiated a silver gleam, the group moved to corral their foe as they fell back.

Their fighting withdrawal was an impressive display. The party seemed to be like a single organism as they fell back in an orderly manner.

“My Lord, O God of Fire—”

“Enough with the useless stuff, hurry up and cast a defensive spell!”

The arcane magic caster restrained the cleric — who was planning to raise his holy symbol — and then began casting a spell on the frontliners. The cleric followed suit.

Although the exact composition varied between jobs, most clerics could use divine power to turn, rebuke or destroy creatures such as undead, demons, angels and the like. However, these abilities only worked on monsters weaker than themselves. In other words, the arcane magic caster had seen the cleric preparing to turn undead with divine might, instantly divined the difference in strength between their foes and themselves, and then instructed him to do something else with his power.

As she watched this series of actions, Shalltear eyed the leader of the party, intending to capture him in accordance with her orders. However, the murderous impulse to spill more blood slowly dyed her heart a crimson red.

She wanted to slaughter them, pulverize them, dismember them, and bathe in their blood. Her breathing grew ragged and she began foaming at the mouth.

“[Anti-Evil Protection].”

“[Lesser Mind Protection].”

The two magic casters laid their spells upon the frontline warriors.

A vague hunt of respect bloomed in Shalltear’s overexcited mind. Although these spells were of the lowest tier — the 1st tier, in fact — they were still the most suitable magic for the current situation. They were unlike the sellswords who had lashed out thoughtlessly, or that stupid warrior who had come out by himself without even knowing martial arts.

Still — no mattered how hard they struggled, meaningless actions were still meaningless. Against a foe who was so overwhelmingly superior to them, nothing they did could possibly mean anything.

Their adorable show of resistance was the last straw that broke the back of Shalltear’s wavering self-control.

“I can’t… I can’t take itttttttttt— I can’t hold back any moooore~!”

With a cry like she had torn free of her bindings, Shalltear stepped forward.

Her steps were light and easy, like a dancer’s. However, to the people before her, she moved faster than the wind.

She thrust out a spear hand.

It pierced her victim’s shield, shattered his armor, ignored his magical protections, ripped straight through his skin, muscle and bone, and closed around the heart which had been beating just a moment ago. And then — she tore it out. As she stood over the body of the collapsed warrior, Shalltear held up the reddish-black mass of tissue — deformed in her grip — before the others. The female warrior whimpered in fear, while the priest’s face twisted in anger.

Shalltear had expected these reactions. Satisfaction filled her as she watched them, and with a revolting smile, she cast a spell.

“[Animate Dead].”

The warrior who had lost his heart slowly stood back up, now transformed into a Zombie, the lowest-tier of undead. Yet, she was not finished.

Shalltear gulped down the heart she was holding, and then reached into the orb of blood floating above her. What she brought back down was a pulsing lump of gore — a caricature of a heart. She then tossed the lump into the Zombie.

The blood-lump writhed like a maggot, then distorted itself as it flowed into the Zombie’s body. In an instant, the Zombie shuddered, its body spasming several times before its exterior slowly changed.

It seemed as though all the water had evaporated from its body, given how its skin had turned into something which resembled dried bark. It sprouted sharp claws and its canines jutted out. Before long, the undead creature before them could no longer be considered a Zombie.

As they watched the birth of a Lesser Vampire, the adventurers exclaimed in shock.

“Impossible! I’ve never heard of a Vampire which could use such high-tier magic without cost!”

“You’re looking at one right now, so don’t panic! Calm down and think!”

“But…!”

“—Retreat’s going to be hard! Attack!”

“Oh!”

The cleric panicked. Perhaps the others had been influenced by that, but one of the warriors swung at Shalltear. The other attacked his former comrade, who was now a Lesser Vampire.

“My Lord, O God of Fire, repel the unclean!”

The cleric held up his holy symbol, which emitted a burst of divine power. Of course, it had no effect on Shalltear.

“Ahhhhahahahahaahaha!”

The sword of one of the warriors bit into the body of the Lesser Vampire, which had been immobilized, possibly by the cleric’s divine power. This was a half-baked Lesser Vampire which had been made from a Zombie, which was why the divine power was actually effective, but the knowledge that the Zombie she had made had lost to divine power displeased Shalltear.

She flicked her little finger, parrying the sword pointed at her, and then glared annoyedly at the cleric who stood in the back line.

“Geeeeet looooooosst—!”

She casually swiped her right hand, but this careless blow was enough to behead the sword-wielding warrior, sending him to the ground in a spray of blood.

“[Lesser Strength].”

That buff spell was cast on the final warrior, who was now fighting a slowed-down Lesser Vampire with his own enhanced body. The warrior had the upper hand, and pressed his advantage.

Since they seemed to be having fun, Shalltear decided to leave them be. After all, there was still prey remaining. Her mind clouded with bloodlust, Shalltear turned to the cleric before her.

The female warrior stepped forward, putting herself into the line of fire, though she only wielded an ordinary steel weapon.

*How adorable, she's still taking a stance with a sword despite her fear* — though that was ultimately the pitiful resistance of a small animal. A wave of heat and delight grew in Shalltear's lower abdomen.

What sounds would she make when she chewed off her fingertips? Maybe she could cut off her ears and feed them to her. No, she should drink her blood first. After all, she was the first female prey she had encountered since she had come to the outside.

"You'll be my desseeeeeeeeeerrrrrtttttt~" Shalltear bellowed from her gaping maw as she leapt over the woman.

Easily leaping over the female warrior, Shalltear landed before the arcane magic caster and the cleric.

Before the cleric could react, Shalltear already had the hand holding his holy symbol in her grasp, and she *squeezed*. The cleric's bones disintegrated under that irresistible force, and shreds of muscle and skin squirted from the gaps between Shalltear's fingers.

“Guwaaaaaargh—!”

After hearing the cleric’s cries, Shalltear was quite pleased with herself, and decided to grant him mercy and end his torment.

With a wave of her hand, the blood spurting from the stump of the cleric’s neck flowed into the orb of blood above Shalltear’s head. She nodded in delight.

At this point, somebody thrust a sword into Shalltear’s back with all their strength. However, attacks like that were completely ineffective against her. Shalltear stood firm like a great tree, though she found the swordpoint protruding from her chest a minor inconvenience.

“No way… not working?! Isn’t this a silver weapon!?”

The sword had pierced her chest — and her heart, as it turned out — but Shalltear’s nonchalance drew a garbled scream from the female warrior.

Since the female warrior did not have a silver weapon, she must have taken it from the body of the slain warrior.

The arcane magic caster was correct, but he was not entirely right. In order to harm Shalltear, a weapon had to be made of silver and possess sufficient mana, or it would require a weapon with a powerful elemental enchantment. Simply being made of silver was not enough.

Shalltear paid the female warrior behind her no heed, and looked at the shocked arcane magic caster.

“[Magic Arrow]!”

In desperation, the magic caster cast a spell, sending two arrows of light streaking at Shalltear. However, they were easily resisted.

This was the result of one of Shalltear’s special abilities — spell resistance. It was not a perfect defense, and depended on the attacker’s own strength. However, given the precipitous gap between their power levels, she could easily resist spells from him.

In other words, there was nothing the arcane magic caster could do to Shalltear.

“Sooooooo~ boooooooooor~ iiiiiiiiiiing~!”

With a casual wave of her hand, Shalltear relieved the person who no longer interested her of his head.

Looking back, she saw that the Lesser Vampire was still struggling with the other warrior.

Shalltear picked up the two fallen heads on the ground and tossed them at the two combatants. The heads — massing about six kilograms each — flew forth with supernatural speed. Then, as expected, both sides collapsed to the ground.

While Shalltear was not paying attention, the dessert (the female warrior) flailed wildly at Shalltear's body with her sword.

Still, what good did that do?

It did not hurt or even bother Shalltear, and it was a meaningless gesture. The only effect it had was opening up holes in her clothes, but as long as Shalltear herself was fine, the magic clothing would automatically restore itself.

"Now theeeeeen~ desseeeeeerrrrrtttttt~! Let's eeeeeeaaaaatttt~!"

Shalltear sounded like a child leaving their favorite food for the last — however, she had a nauseating, wicked smile on her face as she turned to face the female warrior who was hacking away at her back.

As the female warrior met Shalltear's crimson gaze, the female warrior realised that she was the sole survivor, and stumbled back, eyes glistening with tears. She scrabbled at her waistpouch, fishing around inside for something.

Shalltear leisurely savored the blood-dimmed world before her. She seemed curious about what the woman was doing.

Soon, the female warrior pulled out a bottle and threw it.

Shalltear narrowed her eyes at the bottle tumbling through the air, and smiled coldly.

Although the female warrior had hurled it with all her strength, the speed at which the bottle travelled seemed almost unbearably slow to Shalltear. She could have easily dodged it, but her pride as one of the strong did not allow her to avoid it. In addition, she wanted to see the look on the woman’s face when her final trump card crumbled before her eyes.

The urge to slaughter grew and grew.

However, Shalltear tamped it down. After all, the more she controlled herself, the sweeter her delight would be when she finally indulged herself.

Shalltear watched the bottle flying at herself, and idly contemplated it.

It was probably holy water, or some sort of firebomb. She refused to give up despite knowing her struggles did not matter, and continued her pitiful resistance. Perhaps she should start by making her suffer until she prayed for death before slowly tasting her blood. If she was a virgin, she would drain her dry, but if not there were all sorts of lovely games they could play together, as long as she minimized the amount of blood lost.

Having made her decision, Shalltear swatted aside the flying bottle. The force of swiping at the bottle caused the crimson fluid within it to spill from the bottle's mouth and splash on Shalltear's skin.

And then — there was a faint stinging pain.

The insides of Shalltear's mind went white for a moment, and her bloodlust was instantly extinguished.

She looked at the place from which the pain had come, which was the hand which had batted the bottle aside. An acrid odor and a wisp of smoke boiled up from the place where the liquid had touched her.

Shalltear turned to look at the fallen bottle. Its mouth was open, and a faint, sweet scent came from it. Shalltear was very familiar with that container.

It was a potion bottle of the kind commonly used in the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

The liquid within should have been a low-tier healing potion. Since healing items could damage the undead, it was probably why Shalltear's skin had been slightly dissolved.

“Impossible!”

Her roar shook the very air.

“Capture that woman unharmed!”

Upon hearing Shalltear’s command, the Vampire Brides — who had only been watching from the sidelines up till now — sprang into action. In an instant, they had seized the arms of the female warrior while she attempted to flee during Shalltear’s brief stupor.

The female warrior struggled valiantly, but the Vampire Brides’ strength far outmatched hers, and they dragged her before Shalltear.

“Look into my eyes!”

Shalltear seized the female warrior’s chin and forced her to look into her mystic eyes. Of course, she was very careful to control the amount of force that she used. It would be quite troublesome if she ended up wrenching the woman’s jaw off because she used too much strength.

This was because Shalltear could not use regular healing spells, despite being a divine magic caster.

A thin film seemed to cover the eyes of the female warrior as she was forced to meet Shalltear's enchanted gaze. The look of fear and hostility on her face soon became one of friendliness. This was the charming effect of the [Mystic Eyes of Charm] skill, and Shalltear ordered the female warrior released once she felt it had taken full effect.

There were many questions she wanted to ask, However, one burned ahead of all the others.

Shalltear picked up the fallen bottle and held it before the female warrior's face.

"Tell me about this potion! Who did you get it from?!"

"A man in black armor gave it to me at the inn."

*What about it?* The female warrior's answer seemed to leave that unsaid, and Shalltear's body seemed to freeze over.

"...No way… no, this can't be… but… where… in which city is this inn?"

"It was an inn located in E-Rantel."

Shalltear gasped in shock as she felt the world spin. This was because she had a rough idea of who the black-armored man actually was.

If her guess was correct, that only raised more questions. Why did this woman have this potion? That person would not give out potions for no reason.

“Could it be…”

Had that person given the female warrior an order? Or perhaps he had given it to her in order to strengthen their good relations?

Shalltear recalled the dashing image of Ainz Ooal Gown, the absolute ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. The unease she felt at possibly having ruined one of her master’s plans filled her with limitless frustration.

“Why did you come here? What was your objective?”

She was no longer in the mood to dance around the topic. She had to find out as much as possible, and so she stared at the female warrior with eyes that were now bloodshot for a completely different reason.

“Yes. Our job is to protect the city, so we came to investigate when we heard there was a bandit's’ nest nearby. In the end, we found something strange, so we split up our team. Our party was responsible for a reconnaissance in force, which brought us here.”

“You split your team?”

“Yes. We didn’t know how many bandits were present, so we decided to split up and draw the enemy into a trapped area the other party was setting up.”

“So there’s another team,” Shalltear muttered. She clicked her tongue as she realised that this meant more trouble for her.

“Then, how many of you came here?”

“There were seven people including me, and then—”

“Hm? Wait, seven people? Not six?”

Shalltear counted the corpses around them. Three warriors, one mage, one cleric — and this woman. The numbers did not add up.

The female warrior’s answer to Shalltear’s doubt-filled gaze was direct and to the point:

“Yes, there was also a ranger. He said that he would hurry back to E-Rantel for help if an emergency occurred.”

“Say what…?”

The arcane magic caster's voice had been very loud — loud enough that everyone in the depression could hear him.

"Kuh!"

Eyes wide open, Shalltear charged up the sides of the lowlands, faster than the wind. She leapt over the edge and looked around, but even her darkvision-capable eyes could not penetrate the depths of the forest, and though she listened carefully, she could only hear the wind blowing on the grass and trees.

Shalltear did not possess any detection abilities or divination magic. Under these circumstances, finding a single person in the entire forest would probably be impossible.

"Son of a bitch!" she cursed.

He had escaped; she had been too careless. Shalltear ground her teeth as she realized that she had let two of her prey slip away.

"Familiars!"

Several shadows wavered into existence near Shalltear's feet. The shapes of several wolves appeared, but unlike regular wolves, their fur was black as night, and their eyes radiated a malevolent crimson glow.

They were level 7 monsters, Vampire Wolves.

One of the skills Shalltear possessed was called [Household Summons], which allowed her to call forth various monsters. However, these were the ones best suited to tracking and pursuit.

“Hunt down and kill everyone in the forest!”

Upon hearing the shouted order, the ten Vampire Wolves surged into the woods as one.

As she watched the Vampire Wolves leave, Shalltear felt that there was very little chance that they could eliminate the opposition. She thought of Aura, and mused that even if he was not as talented as her, the opponent was still a ranger, and ought to know how to evade pursuit.

In other words, he would probably escape. If that was the case, what should she do next? Shalltear hurriedly returned and seized the female warrior before asking:

“Did anyone else receive a potion or other items from the man in black armor?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Really now! Then, next question, will that ranger link up with the other party?”

“No. Our plan was that if either of the parties was in danger of being wiped out, he would abandon the other one and return to the city. That choice had the highest chance of keeping us alive.”

They had made meticulous preparations in case they failed, and it was this careful planning which had left her powerless to respond. As Shalltear realized this, anger burned within her.

“How dare you miserable humans come up with so many tricky ideas — if I earn the right to rule you, I’ll treat you like the worms that you are!”

Still, even venting her spleen would not change the present circumstances.

The opposition would bring news that there was a Vampire here back to the city.

Although Shalltear did not know if the opposition had clearly seen her face, human eyesight would probably not be able to discern the identity of Shalltear in the depression.

Even so—

“Shit!”

Shalltear cursed again, and then continued to think.

The orders Ainz had given her were—

*Your prey this time are criminals and other undesirables whose absence will not be missed.*

*For instance, if you encounter anyone among the bandits who can use magic or martial arts, you are to capture them at all costs, even if you have to drain them dry and make them your slaves. You are also to capture anyone who knows about this world and who is skilled in combat. However, do not make waves; if people know Nazarick is making a move, it might cause a lot of trouble for us.*

—And that was it.

That being the case, she had already violated many aspects of those orders.

Shalltear struggled to resist the impulse to scratch at her head.

“It’s still okay, it’s still okay, it’s still okay.”

She seemed to be trying to persuade herself.

Perhaps the other side would bring the news of a Vampire back, but her name and the involvement of Nazarick would not be exposed.

In other words, she had not left any clues which would link the Vampire attack here to Nazarick. If the people in the city thought about it, they would only conclude that the sellswords here had been slaughtered by a wild Vampire — if one existed in the area.

There were inconsistencies anywhere, but the opposition would not be able to find them without gathering more information.

Shalltear continued thinking.

The question now was what to do with this woman under the current conditions.

Though she was currently charmed, this woman had not completely lost her memory. The quickest way would be to kill her, but that posed problems of its own; namely, why Shalltear's master had given this woman that potion.

If her master had given her the potion for some reason or purpose, then killing this woman would obstruct her master's goals, which would be very bad.

If she let her go, her employers would definitely ask why she was the only one who had survived. In addition, she knew a lot — in particular, Shalltear's appearance. While that was not a problem now, nobody could tell how that situation might develop in the future.

The best way would be to contact her master, but Shalltear could not use the [Message] spell.

Then what should she do—

"Ahhhh— Ainz-sama is going to scold me…"

Shalltear muttered so softly that nobody could hear, grabbing her head in agonized thought.

"If only I didn't have this [Blood Frenzy]... no, saying that would be disrespectful to my creator, Peroroncino-sama. If only I could control this [Blood Frenzy]…"

It was too late for any regrets, and no matter how she dealt with this woman, it seemed a scolding would be inevitable. The question now was how to minimize the damage which had been done.

"Worse" was still better than the "worst".

Shalltear thought and thought, until it seemed smoke would start to come out of her ears, before coming to a conclusion.

Rather than killing her, letting her live gave her more options. She could not take back the fact that she had killed her, but sparing her allowed room for the situation to play out.

That was what Shalltear had decided. Or rather, this was how desperately she was trying to delude herself.

“What is your name?”

“Britta.”

“Got it… I’ll remember it!”

Shalltear ordered the girl called Britta to stay where she was, then brought her two Vampire Bride servants some distance away:

“In any case, let’s recover everything here and then retreat right away.”

She had her doubts about whether there would be time for that. However, she still had to take a chance and hope that the opposition would think that wealth had been her objective. Though she had failed in her mission, she still had to make plans to spread false information.

“Shalltear-sama, what should we do with the women?”

As she heard the question, Shalltear looked to Britta in the distance.

“Leave her be.”

“No, I was referring to the other women.”

“—What? What other women?”

“Yes, Shalltear-sama. I searched the interior to root out any fish who slipped our net, and I found several women who seem to have been used to satisfy the men’s lusts. What should we do with them?”

Shalltear’s face froze.

What was this all about?

Shalltear turned back to look.

If her face had not been seen, she could leave them and be done with it. However, she did not know if that was the right choice. She should probably kill them all as well. No, if she did that, it would be quite unnatural for Britta to be the sole survivor.

Shalltear was frustrated that she could not come to a conclusion which benefited her.

“What should we do—”

“Hah?! I don’t know!”

The look on Shalltear’s face seemed to say: *Why the hell are you lot telling me all of this? As long as I don’t know, I can claim ignorance, but if I know and deliberately ignore it, I’ll be betraying my master.*

“Whatever! I don’t know! Leave them be, dump them here! Throw Britta in with those women!”

“Will that be all right?”

“How the hell should I know, dammit, shut the hell up!”

“My apologies, Shalltear-sama.”

“We’re leaving, get ready!”

The Vampire Brides bowed and began moving. Shalltear grabbed her head and slowly crouched down.

“...I’m going to be scolded for sure… what should I do… however… hm?”

Shalltear raised her head, looking toward the part of the forest where the Vampire Wolves had gone.

“...Did they find him?”

Shalltear sensed the disappearance of her familiars. It was not the disappearance of magical banishment, but the discorporation of being killed.

“Follow me after you take care of that woman! Get the marker ready!”

Having made a decision, Shalltear paused only to snap off a terse command before sprinting out at lightning speeds.

Although she was forced to slow down in the forest, as long as her targets were human beings, they could not escape from Shalltear’s clutches, even when mounted.

She burst from the forest, to the last known position of her familiars.

There were twelve people before her.

Each person was attired in a full panoply of equipment which varied between each of them.

Their gear was not simple and functional, but as decorative and unique as Shalltear's own equipment. They looked quite potent at a glance. Of course, Shalltear did not have any skills to discern the power of magic items, so she had to go by her gut, but she felt that their magic items might be of legendary-class or above.

Doubts appeared in Shalltear's head, given that she had no idea where these people hailed from. These twelve people seemed completely different from the others that Shalltear had seen in this world. It was the difference between a lion and a mouse.

Shalltear considered the twelve men and women, and her gaze finally rested on one of them, a man.

*That man… is he strong?*

Shalltear was surprised and had no levels in dedicated warrior classes, so her assessment of her opposition's strength told her that he was not only stronger than the Vampire Brides she had brought along, but stronger still than Solution, the Pleiades battle maid.

Shalltear took a closer look at the man.

The gear he wore seemed to have been designed for use by a man, which was why she had pegged him as a male, but he seemed quite androgynous in appearance.

She did not know if he was male or female, since he resembled both a man or a woman, yet did not look like either. He was not very tall, and seemed quite youthful. Perhaps he was still growing, which only made it harder to tell.

His hair was black and long, almost reaching the ground, while his keen eyes had red pupils which regarded Shalltear with caution. He carried a plain-looking spear which seemed incongruous with the rest of his equipment.

“—Use it.”

The man issued a clear, crisp command — like the surface of a frozen lake — and panic broke out in the rest of the party. Shalltear had no idea what those words meant. However, she imagined that whatever was being used was powerful, possibly enough to rival Shalltear’s sole divine-class item.

The others sprang into action in response to the command, but Shalltear paid them no heed. There was only one person who stood out in her reckoning; the others did not seem like much of a threat.

The group’s formation was centered around a woman in a strange dress.

It had a high-necked collar, with two long slits on either sides, so it was probably some sort of ladies' full length dress. It was silver in color, with a five-clawed dragon picked out in gold thread along its surface.

In Ainz's world, this sort of dress would be called a qipao.

However, the woman wearing it was very old, her face was full of wrinkles, and her exposed legs looked like burdocks or dried potatoes. That dress was thoroughly unsuitable for her and frankly speaking, it made onlookers frown. Shalltear even went so far as to avert her eyes.

◆◆◆

However, this was the last link in a long chain of accidents and coincidences.

If even a tiny little detail had occurred differently, things might have turned out some other way.

If Ainz had not captured Nigun, if Ainz had not counterattacked the Theocracy's divination spells so fiercely, if the Theocracy had not mistaken this for the revival of the Catastrophe Dragon Lord, if Shalltear had not been distracted — perhaps events would have unfolded differently. However, the sum of all these possibilities might have instead been phrased as an inevitability.

That qipao was called [Downfall of Castle and Country] (Kei Seke

Kouku). This was a sacred treasure left behind by the gods who saved all humanity, and its power exceeded that of anything which Shalltear carried.

(TL Note: 倾城倾国: this is the item Nigun mentioned as “Kei Seke Kouku” in Vol. 1)

♦♦♦

—Shalltear shivered.

This was the first time which Shalltear — as a Guardian, one of the highest-ranking entities in the Great Tomb of Nazarick — had ever shivered. It was a subtle observation, or one could call it a warning from a sixth sense.

Shalltear’s eyes turned, intending to seize the old lady her instincts were warning her about.

That human had to die at all costs.

The spear-wielding man rushed at her just as she realized this and was about to make her move.

“Get lost!”

Shalltear batted him aside with all her might. However, when subjected to a strike that would pulverize a weak human being, the man was simply knocked back and did not perish on the spot. In addition, his will to fight was still intact despite being blown away.

Shalltear cast a spell, centered on the old lady.

“[Mass Hold Species]!”

She wanted to capture several people. This was because she had a premonition that capturing these people would not only make up for her previous errors, but earn her praise.

As she thought that, Shalltear’s mind suddenly turned white.

It felt as though part of her thought processes were gone, because she could not comprehend what was happening. And then, when she realised what had happened, Shalltear was shaken to the core, fear filling her undead heart.

This was mind control.

As an undead being, she should have had complete immunity to mind-controlling items, yet her will was still being dominated. She desperately tried to engrave hatred and anger on her gradually-whitening consciousness, and as her mind pondered countless variations of the worst-case scenario—

“Giiiiiiiih—!”

—She wailed, weeping tears of blood as she struggled to fight back against the dominating force which was corrupting her, a Guardian of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

However, despite Shalltear’s frantic resistance, her will was steadily bleached away. Nor could she use teleportation magic. This was because her mind would be completely overshadowed if she allowed herself to be distracted by such matters.

Shalltear used a class skill to create a [Purifying Javelin]. It was a gigantic lance of the holy element, and despite her own evil alignment, it could still cause massive damage to her foes. The most important thing was that she could spend MP to imbue it with perfect accuracy and tracking ability.

As she marshalled her utmost opposition, Shalltear glared at the user of the technique, the old lady who was planning to defile her. She did not take the man who held the large, mirror-like shield standing between her and the old lady into consideration.

And then — she threw.

With the part of her mind that was still conscious and aware, she hurled the lance which she held.

As her mind went white, she used that skill of hers to the full extent of its power, striking an augmented blow.

The strike flashed by in a streak of light and struck the old lady after penetrating the body of the man in front of her and the shield he was holding.

The last thing Shalltear saw was the panicked group and the two of them coughing up blood in agony.

# Overlord Volume 3 Interlude

## Intermission

*Translator: Nigel*

The Royal Capital of the Re-Estize Kingdom.

In the heart of the Royal Capital Ro-Lante lay a keep, made from a series of over twenty vast circular towers joined by curtain walls. Within its depths lay the Valencia Palace.

There was a room within the Palace that was more functional than decorative, where many nobles were gathered.

Among them was the form of the Kingdom's Warrior-Captain, Gazef Stronoff. He was currently genuflecting before the master to whom he had sworn his life, the man who sat on the throne, King Ranpossa III.
*He seems to have gotten older.*

That was the impression the King gave him when he compared the man now to how he had been half a month ago, when he had set out.

His beloved liege's pale hair was a mess, and his skinny body could not be described as healthy by any stretch of the word, and his complexion was similarly poor. The hand which grasped his scepter was as slender as a dried branch, and the crown he wore seemed to hang heavily on his head.

He had reigned for 39 years, and he was now 60 years old. He should have handed the throne to an appropriate successor, but the problem was that he had no such successor

It was not because there was a lack of princes to inherit the throne. On the contrary, there were two princes, but both of them were far from ideal. If he gave them the throne, they would become puppets dancing on the strings of the Great Nobles.

The old man spoke weakly:

“Warrior-Captain, I am glad that you have returned safely.”

“Yes! Thank you, Your Majesty!”

Those sympathetic words drew a deep bow from Gazef as he responded.

“Umu. I have received some reports, but I would like to hear what happened from your own mouth, Warrior-Captain.”

“Understood.”

Gazef described in detail the events of what had happened after he left the Royal Capital and reached Carne Village. He paid particular attention to the mysterious magic caster known as Ainz Ooal Gown, but he did not mention his suspicions of the Slaine Theocracy’s involvement. This was because Gazef felt it would be best if less people knew about the matter, and so it was inadvisable to speak about it in this place.

And so, Gazef talked and talked. He narrated a heroic tale of a man who stepped in to right a wrong in his way, who plunged fearlessly into danger to rescue the villagers, with no regard to the cost to himself.

“Is that so. That certainly is a glowing review of him. To think, he would go into danger to save the weak…”

Several nobles exchanged patronizing gossip about Ainz Ooal Gown as the King muttered those words of praise.

A problematic individual.

A deviant who did not dare reveal his face to the world.

A magic caster with a strange name.

In the end, they even brought up the idea that he might have staged the attack in order to advertise himself.

Gazef strove to keep his anger from showing on his face. He felt profoundly useless for being unable to defend his savior from their words.

There was a reason for that, of course. That was because the nobles mocking Ainz had one thing in common — they were from one of the big factions in the Kingdom; that of the Great Nobles.

30% of the Re-Estize Kingdom was directly ruled by the King, while the Great Nobles controlled another 30%. The remaining 40% was a feudal domain which belonged to the other nobles. In addition, the Kingdom's leadership was divided into two factions, which struggled for power all day and night.

On one hand was the Royal faction, while on the other was the Noble faction, which was composed of more than half of the Kingdom's Six Great Nobles. Though they were currently before the King, this was merely an extension of the battlefield where both sides did battle.

Because of that, Gazef — being of the Royal faction, and thus the King's trusted servant — was unwilling to interject casually. He knew that his own clumsy phrasings could not possibly defeat those nobles, so he had to instead minimize his own chances of misspeaking.

*...The Slaine Theocracy's secret forces knew how we were moving and showed up at the right time… that means there's a high chance of a spy within the Kingdom. That being the case, it might be one of the Noble faction's people...*

Gazef's gaze turned to one of the nobles, who had an exceptionally cold look in his eyes.

His blond hair was tied back, and he had a pair of narrow, blue eyes.

His skin was the same wan color unique to those who avoided the sun. He projected the image of a venomous snake that was only reinforced by his slim build.

He should have been less than 40 years old, but his unhealthy complexion made him seem older than that.

His name was Marquis Raeven, one of the Six Great Nobles. He flitted between both factions like a bat for his own gain, and he was one of those who backed the King's second son.

*If there was a traitor to the King, it should be him, right?*

Sensing Gazef's eyes upon him, Marquis Raeven quirked up the edge of his already-thin lips. Gazef stiffened up even further in response to this provocation.

"Then, let us conclude your report here, Warrior-Captain. There are other important matters to decide."

Those tired words from the king briefly silenced the chatter from the clustered nobles. Gazef returned to the King's side and surveyed the nobles. As a man with the King's trust, he was already used to their displeased glares.

“Then, if tradition holds, we ought to be going to war with the Empire in several months  time. Let us discuss how we will address this matter. Marquis Raeven, explain to everyone.”

“Understood, your Majesty.”

The ghost-like man walked silently before them, and began speaking in a low voice.

Nobody interrupted him. Not only did he have influence in each faction, but he was also the most powerful of the Six Great Nobles. Nobody would dare make an enemy of him.

Marquis Raeven outlined his plans for the future, describing how many men under arms he would require of each noble, all without meeting any opposition. When he was finished, he smiled haughtily and bowed to the King:

“—And that is all.”

“Thank you, Marquis Raeven. Does anyone have any objections?”

The court became a sea of commotion once more, with people talking at and over each other.

“It’s our turn to take the offensive. Let’s attack the Empire while we’re at it.”

“Exactly! I’m getting tired of just beating back the Empire.”

“Precisely. Let us show those fools in the Empire how frightening we can be.”

“Indeed, you have it at that, Count-sama.”

The laughter of lavishly-dressed men echoed through the court.

*Don't be stupid.* How refreshing it would be if he could actually say that.

The Kingdom and its neighbor, the Empire, faced off at the Katze Plains every year.

To date, neither side had sustained heavy casualties, but that was only because the Empire had not committed its forces to the battlefield. If they truly intended to conquer the Kingdom, there would be no need for them to form up at the Katze Plains and await the Kingdom's army.

Gazef and some of the nobles who could use their brains felt that the objective of these events was to deplete the strength of the Kingdom.

Take for instance the Kingdom with its peasant levies, compared to the Empire and its professional corps of knights.

It was immediately obvious whose troops were individually superior, which was why the Kingdom had to mobilize over twice as many troops as the Empire. As a result, having fielded more men, they would need more rations for those men. Of course, there were some magic items which could produce food, but said food only qualified as such because of their nutritional value. Their taste was so revolting that even starving people would think twice about eating it. Thus, this magically created food could not substitute for proper rations.

In addition, the Empire chose the harvest season of the late-ripening wheat to invade, causing a lack of hands in the villages. This delayed the harvest of wheat and other grains.

In this way, the Kingdom would weaken without the need for a full-scale invasion, and this would weaken the power of the Crown.

Because of that, the Noble faction paid these consequences no heed. In fact, they were delighted by the Royal faction — their enemies — losing their power and influence.

*Once the strength of the Kingdom fades, the Empire will invade in force. Do you think the enemy will truly be content with such small skirmishes? Why are you all so naive?!*

The Noble faction believed that they would wield their absolute power forever. Gazef was particularly infuriated by these nobles.

“If that’s the case, could it be that the suspicious magic caster who aided the Warrior-Captain is a man from the Empire? Perhaps he intends to infiltrate us as a spy.”

“Ah, I see. You’re right. They say the Empire has an academy which trains magic casters, so that’s very likely.”

“The people of the Slaine Theocracy have a given name, a baptismal name, and a surname. However, what if his name is an alias”

“I feel uncomfortable about someone like that appearing in the Kingdom. Perhaps we should think of some way to deal with him?”

“Perhaps we could consider capturing him alive. Frankly speaking, the real problem is the Adventurers’ Guild. They count several magic casters in their number and do as they please. We need to deal with them as soon as possible. Perhaps we could make them our vassals or something.”

“Then, there are the fees the Guild collects. The adventurers within the Kingdom charge a ridiculous sum to eliminate monsters within our borders!”

“The best solution would be to bring him back here.”

Gazef could no longer remain silent after hearing this. There was no way he could allow them to continue badmouthing the person who had saved himself, his subordinates, and the villagers.

“A moment, if you please. To begin with, that magic caster is well-disposed toward the Kingdom; it would not be a wise decision to try and capture someone like—”

Gazef had spoken in an attempt to redirect the increasingly biased talk within the court. Several nobles reacted with looks of disgust.

Gazef had reached his current position by the sole merit of his swordsmanship. He was little more than an upstart to these nobles with their long and distinguished histories.

Thus, Gazef was the subject of much derision. The fact that nobody could match his martial skills only deepened the nobles’ resentment.

These highborn aristocrats could not bear to be outdone by someone of humbler origins than themselves.

Several nobles continued criticizing Ainz Ooal Gown without waiting for Gazef to finish, and others joined in as well.

Upon his throne, the King spoke with a hoarse sigh:

“...That’s enough. I feel that the Warrior-Captain’s decision was not in error.”

“Muu… well, if you say so, your Majesty...”

The nobles did not retort, but instead temporarily concealed the mocking grins on their faces.

Gazef looked with gratitude at the liege who had selected him and to whom he had pledged his ultimate fealty.

The King saw the look in Gazef's eyes, and nodded.

♦♦♦

Gazef was always tired after these meetings, filled as they were with power plays and flattery, but Gazef did not let his fatigue show on his face as he accompanied the King back to the Palace.

The King had injured his knee in a previous war, and he was unsteady on his feet even with a walking stick. Yet, Gazef did not extend a hand to support him, as a consideration for the King's dignity. In addition, if he had reached a state where he needed someone to support him in order to walk, the Noble faction's cries for him to abdicate would only grow louder, in order to secure a place for an easily-manipulated puppet prince on the throne.

Therefore, though Gazef regretted the necessity of such, he had to let the King walk on his own.

As they slowly walked down the corridor and neared his chambers, the King suddenly said:

"...We will still need the power of the nobles to halt the aggressions of the Empire. If I denounced them on the spot, the Kingdom would tear itself apart without the need for an Imperial invasion."

Though it had come out abruptly, Gazef understood what the King wished to say, so he could only grit his teeth.

"How I envy the Empire."

Gazef could not find anything to say which could comfort the King and answer his mumblings.

The Empire had itself been a feudal kingdom three generations ago. However, the power of the nobles had been steadily eroded, and the current crop was now absolutely loyal to the reigning Emperor.

The reigning Emperor — Jircniv Rune Farlord El Nix

His title of the Bloody Emperor had come from the river of blood that had flowed when he came to power. Gazef recalled the time when he had met the man himself on the battlefield; the Emperor who wanted to bring him into his service.

That Emperor was a born ruler.

“I apologize for not being able to protect you because of my lack of consideration. I could not even outfit you properly before giving you that dangerous command… Please forgive me for the lives of your men that were lost because of that… because of me.”

“No, it’s not like that…”

“Gazef, it’s fine. And… while it cannot make up for their deaths, I would like to pay out some form of compensation to the families of the deceased. In addition, I would like to directly convey my gratitude to Gown-dono, and thank him for saving my closest confidante.”

He should have been troubled by the idea that the King would actually thank a nameless commoner in person who had not personally aided him, but —

“If he is truly a righteous man, then your words alone will be satisfaction enough.”

“Is that so — hm?”

Two people came into view before the King’s eyes. The one which caught his attention was the beautiful girl who walked in front. It was said that her loveliness was such that it could not be accurately reproduced in paintings; it was a truly indescribable beauty.

The King smiled. He had always favored his little princess over his other children.

Renner Theire Chardon Ryle Vaiself

As the third princess of the royal family, she had inherited her mother’s blinding beauty, and she was renowned as the “Golden Princess”.

Having reached the age of 16, it was about time for her to be married off. That too was a reason why the nobles were getting restless.

Her blonde hair was one of the reasons for her moniker. It flowed over her neck and down her back. Her smiling lips were a pale pink, yet she looked healthy and vital. Her sapphire-like eyes were a gentle and deep blue.

Her skilfully tailored white dress only added to the image of purity which she projected, while the golden necklace around her neck seemed to symbolize her noble spirit.

Behind her was a young man in his teenage years. Clad in a suit of pure white armor, he could be summarized in a single word — intense.

A pair of coarse, bushy brows sprouted above his impassive eyes.

His face had a firm, unyielding expression, as though forged from steel, and his skin was tanned dark by the sun. His blond hair was neatly trimmed for ease of movement and to avoid it getting tangled during combat.

This young man’s name was Climb, and Gazef had no idea how to get along with him. It was not that he disliked the lad; on the contrary, he actually liked him.

However, Gazef could not bear the air of intensity which surrounded him. He appreciated serious people like him, but he hoped that the boy could at least lighten up a little.

Still, Gazef understood his feelings.

As someone who stood beside the most beautiful woman in the Kingdom, he was the target of much hatred and jealousy, without so much as a friend to call his own. In addition, he came from the same humble origins as Gazef — no, worse than Gazef. Thus, he could not show any weakness, could not allow anyone to criticize a single move he made.

“Father, Warrior-Captain-sama.”

The King smiled to Renner as she jogged over, and nodded to Climb as he bowed deeply.

“The meeting’s finally over.”

“Umu. There was much to discuss, after all.”

“Is that so. I was thinking about something, so I decided to wait here so I could tell you about it.”

“Really, really now. I apologize, then.”

The things she pondered were hardly trivial matters.

The other reason why she was known as the Golden Princess was due to her adroit mind and admirable spirit. Not only were her policies revolutionary, but she had even proposed new laws, all of which were sound and sensible.

The policies she proposed seemed to be entirely centered around measures that aided the lower classes. However, these were not simple handouts, but a comprehensive system of relief policies designed to give those people who wanted to work a chance to feed themselves by their own power.

In addition, these policies would also improve the place of the common folk, heighten their loyalty to the Crown, improve productivity, and positively affect the Crown in general.

Although most of these initiatives had been dismantled by nobles — who opposed any improvement in the lot of the peasants — the wiser members of society and those people who had benefited from those policies strongly approved of her.

“Then, I’ll listen to you when I return to my chambers.”

“But Father, now is the time for me  to go walking about. Please permit me to go on a stroll with Climb before returning.”

Climb stiffened even further when he heard the Princess imply that her walks with him were more important than speaking to the King. Gazef felt a little sorry for him.

*Still, Princess Renner has always been a free spirit. All he can do as her follower is go along for the ride.*

“If that is the case, then go. When you return, come to my chambers and tell me about it.”

“I understand. Then, let’s go, Climb.”

“Then, your humble servant shall take his leave.”

Gazef made a suggestion to the bowing Climb, in his capacity as a warrior:

“Climb, you need to hone your swordsmanship, so you can defend Princess Renner under any circumstances.”

“Yes, sir!”

Climb nodded vigorously, but Renner then replied in a disapproving tone.

“Climb’s fine. He’ll be able to protect me, no matter what happens.”

There was no basis for her words. Still, after hearing the Princess speak, even he felt that Climb could do it.

“Then, let’s go, Climb.”

Renner’s dainty fingers tugged on the corner of Climb’s clothing. It was probably an unconscious gesture, but when Climb discovered the Princess was doing so, his face hardened up even further, until it seemed as unyielding as diamond.

“Yes, my Princess.”

Though Climb’s expression was seemingly neutral as Renner dragged him away, his eyes revealed his inner torment and how moved he was as he left with the Princess.

The two of them had forgotten their place as master and servant, but the King paid it no heed. He simply watched the two of them leave, as though they were beloved treasures which he had lost long ago.

“...I probably shouldn’t be pitying him, given that I’m the King, don’t you think?”

Climb’s origins were unknown. He was a pauper’s child that Renner had picked up during an excursion from the keep.

Then, he had been a skinny boy on the verge of starving to death. He had worked hard and trained ceaselessly to protect his savior. No, training and working hard were not enough to describe what he had done.

He lacked any talent for swordsmanship or magic, nor did he possess outstanding physical abilities.

However, he had been honing himself little by little, day by day. Of course, his skills were not on the level of Gazef, nor were they in the realm of heroes. Even so, the strength he had gained from training himself put him at the pinnacle of all the warriors in the Kingdom. That said, there were some obstacles which he could not overcome.

Said obstacles were his status, his power, and his personal value.

A place close to Princess Renner was very valuable, and Climb was unworthy of it.

“Your servant understands.”

“I know it’s foolish, but at the very least, I’d like to let one of my daughters… be free. No, if I do that, my other daughters will scold me. How old and foolish I must be, to think of such things.”

The King looked to the sky, as though he had seen someone there.

“For all I know, I might have to subject this daughter of mine to unhappiness as well.”

If he had to marry off the princess now, she would probably be matched to someone from the Great Nobles.

That was what Gazef thought, but he did not say anything, because he did not know what to say. Only someone of similar status to the King could understand his troubles, and Gazef was not such a person.

Silence passed between the two of them, and then they stepped forward again, to clear it away.

# Overlord Volume 3 Chapter 3

## Confusion and Understanding

OVERLORD 3 The bloody valkyrie
3章 混乱と把握

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The first thing that Ainz saw after teleporting was a hill. No, it was nothing as tall as a hill; it was more of a rise in the land, six meters tall at the very most.

The raised land was covered in dense vegetation of the kind one might find on the plains, and it gave the impression of having been there for a long time. Many similar mounds dotted the landscape as far as one looked, giving the impression that they covered the surrounding region.

Naturally, this was not the case.

This landscape had been created by Mare, one of the Guardians of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Buried beneath these mounds were the surface walls of the Tomb.

Ainz cast a [Fly] spell and flew over the heaped dirt. Within his expansive field of view, the only thing he could see was weed-strewn land, with no trace of the surface level of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. It was almost completely covered by soil.

Ainz did not linger over this scenery, but continued flying at his current speed.

Once he reached a certain point, the scenery changed, and he felt as though he had pierced some sort of thin membrane. The hilly terrain vanished, and the familiar scenery of his home filled Ainz's eyes.

This was the sign that he had breached the protective layer of illusions.

Without slowing the speed of his [Fly] spell, Ainz continued toward his destination, the largest mausoleum at the center. That was because it was the sole entrance to the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

As he neared the bone-white steps of the mausoleum, he discovered countless forms beneath him. Suppressing his feelings of anxiety, he landed before them.

“Welcome back, Ainz-sama,” said a gentle female voice. It was soon followed by a chorus of other greetings and welcomes.

The woman in the pure white dress who stood before him was none other than Albedo, the Guardian Overseer of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. She was the one with the clearest picture of the current situation.

The four maids behind her were members of the battle maids (Pleiades), and behind them were a line of level 80 vassals.

After speaking to Albedo via a [Message] spell, he had given Narberal her orders and then teleported back immediately. The fact that Albedo could gather so many people to welcome Ainz in five minutes spoke volumes of Albedo’s skill as an administrator.

Filled with respect for that fact, Ainz raised his hand and waved in response to his vassals’ greetings. Perhaps he should have said a couple of words in thanks, but that was not suitable given the circumstances.

“Albedo, about what you said through the [Message]...”

*Had Shalltear really betrayed them?*

He wanted to ask that question, but hesitated to do so. Unease surged within him — he feared that if he asked about her betrayal, he would find that it was true. In addition, it was too dangerous to discuss this matter in front of the vassals.

“Yes, shall we discuss it elsewhere?”

“That’s right… we should speak of it in the Throne Room, no?”

“Indeed. Then — Yuri, present Ainz-sama with his ring.”

A bespectacled maid stepped forward from the maids lined up behind her.

Yuri wore the same basic combat-ready maid uniform that Narberal did, but there were some differences in her outfit.

Narberal’s maid uniform was designed to protect its wearer, but Yuri’s outfit prioritized ease of movement. The proof of that could be seen in the lack of metal parts on the front of her skirt.

Her metal gauntlets were covered in spikes, and all she had to do was clench her fists to turn them into deadly weapons.

Her wide blue choker was decorated with a small, translucent gemstone. It radiated a light from within, which shimmered and flickered as though cast by a flame.

Her hair was done up in a bun behind her, and her prim features were cool and elegant, giving her an air of wisdom.

She was Yuri Alpha, assistant leader of the Pleiades Battle Maids. As the male Sebas was their leader, it would not be wrong to consider her the organizer of the Pleiades.

She held a tray in both hands, which was draped with a purple satin cloth. The cloth itself bore a ring — the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Ainz picked up the ring, and placed it upon his ring finger.

This ring permitted its wearer to freely teleport throughout the Great

Tomb of Nazarick. Ainz removed it during any excursion to the outside world, because he feared that it might be stolen.

As he looked at the ring upon his skeletal finger, Ainz nodded, as though in approval. The discomfort of not wearing it for several days vanished, replaced by a supreme satisfaction.

“Then, let us go, Albedo.”

He could not directly teleport into the Throne Room, so he used the Ring’s power to send him to the room (the Lemegeton) which directly adjoined the Throne Room.

After opening the massive doors, Ainz entered in the company of Albedo, heading for the crystal throne. As he walked, Ainz asked the question he had been pondering just now.

“Then, before we start, I have some questions for you. You said that Shalltear betrayed us; then, when she betrayed us, how did Sebas — who was in the same place at her — react? Did he not betray us along with her?”

“Yes. There were no signs of his betrayal.”

“Then, did you question Sebas about the matter?”

“I did, and he finished his report to me. According to Sebas, they encountered a group of bandits. After that, Shalltear headed toward the bandits’ hideout in order to capture them. Nothing suspicious occurred during that time, and she vocally proclaimed her intent to render loyal service to you, Ainz-sama.”

“I see. In other words, something happened after that which made her decide to betray us.”

“Yes… in addition, she brought two Vampire Brides with her.

However, they seem to have been destroyed.”

“...Is that so. But mooks like that… no, that means something happened which destroyed them. Then, I’ll summarize what happened on my end.”

Ainz had almost finished his report by the time they reached the stairs to the throne. However, he had not gotten to the events of the tomb yet, so he continued speaking.

After it was all finished, Albedo — who had been listening attentively and silently — nodded in acknowledgement.

Ainz wanted to ask if he had handled the situation well, but there was something more important that he wished to know.

He looked to the throne and recited the designated password.

“Master Source — Open.”

A translucent window appeared before his eyes. It looked like the console, but was completely different from it.The window had multiple pages within it, each covered in densely-packed characters.

This was the administration system for the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

It recorded the daily maintenance costs, the numbers and types of vassals present, all sorts of magical traps and gimmicks and so on. One could exert large-scale control over them all from here. While they had still been in YGGDRASIL, one could access this system from anywhere, but after some experimentation, Ainz found that in this world, the system could only be operated from the heart of the dungeon, the Throne Room.

*Although it’s troublesome to have to come here every time… at least I have the ring to teleport me… so it’s not such a big deal.*

With practiced movements, Ainz brought up and enlarged the NPC status page.

This page recorded the names of all the NPCs made by the guild members. After changing the sorting method from alphabetical (katakana) order to level order, from highest to lowest, Ainz's eyes travelled down the list — and then his eyes halted on a single spot. Then, he silently turned his gaze to Albedo's face.

"Yes, it has become like this."

Amidst a sea of names written in white, only Shalltear Bloodfallen's name was shown in black.

Ainz knew what this change meant, but—

He looked over it twice, three times, and after realizing that his eyes had not been mistaken, he screamed "Impossible!" within his heart If his skeletal face could display an expression, it would be one of shock.

"...Is she dead?"

Ainz continued questioning Albedo. In his heart of hearts, he hoped that something had happened to the system when they had been brought to this world. However, the truth Albedo spoke was unbearably cruel:

"If she were dead, her name would have vanished and left a blank space. In all likelihood, this represents betrayal."

"Well... that's right."

As Ainz replied thusly to Albedo, he recalled the meaning of this change when he had last seen it in YGGDRASIL.

Albedo called it betrayal, but that was slightly different from what the system was displaying. Indeed, broadly speaking it was similar to betrayal, but this color change occurred when a third party used mind control to make an NPC take hostile actions temporarily.

Impossible.

Ainz voiced that denial in his heart once more. Shalltear and Ainz were both undead, which meant that they were of races that were immune to all sorts of mind-affecting effects. How had Shalltear been mind-controlled, then?

It was easier to accept the fact that Shalltear had simply betrayed Nazarick. For example, she might have been unhappy with her treatment and someone on the outside might have offered her better terms, thus leading to her treachery.

If that was not the case, it meant that something had happened when they had come to this world which was outside the scope of Ainz's knowledge.

Ainz recalled Nfirea's face. Indeed, perhaps a talent-holder like himself with some unknown power could have affected an undead mind.

"...Could this be the effect of some being, phenomenon or special effect that is unique to this world?"

"It is uncertain. However, Shalltear's betrayal is certain enough, so I propose that we assemble a strike force immediately."

At this moment Ainz suddenly realized something. Could it be that the vassals who had welcomed Ainz back were intended to eliminate Shalltear? As he brought them back to mind, he noticed that there were many vassals among them who were a rare sight in

Nazarick, the ones who possessed holy-elemental attacks which were effective against the undead.

Albedo continued in a voice that seemed to be made of steel:

“I wish to nominate myself as the commander of this expedition, and if you permit it, I would like to have Cocytus as my executive officer and include Mare in our forces, Ainz-sama.”

These choices were perfect for destroying Shalltear. It was clear that Albedo was very serious about this.

Shalltear Bloodfallen was very strong. In fact, she was the strongest of the Guardians, barring Gargantua. Therefore, one would need the team members selected by Albedo to be absolutely certain of defeating her, or else one would have a very hard time.

“Do you approve?”

“No, it’s too soon to come to that conclusion. Let us verify the reasons behind Shalltear’s betrayal first.”

“You are indeed compassionate, Ainz-sama. However, as long as anyone faces the Supreme Beings with hostility, there is no need to show them any mercy.”

“That’s not correct, Albedo. It is not that I am showing mercy to Shalltear, but I simply do not understand why she would betray us.”

If this sort of thing could happen to anyone other than Shalltear, he had to figure out a way to deal with it.

If she was unhappy with how she had been treated, then the same thing might happen to the other vassals. Thus, he would have to take the appropriate measures to nip it in the bud.

If this were the result of some sort of domination ability from a talent, he would also need to figure out some way to counteract it.

When he heard from the [Message] that an NPC created by his friends had betrayed him, he felt as though he had been condemned by everyone (the other guild members), as a guildmaster. So great was the shock that he had nearly fallen to his knees. However, this was no longer a simple matter of being rebuked by others.

He had to solve this problem not as a guildmaster, but in his capacity as the absolute ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. It was far too early to despair, and if — though it was impossible — Shalltear had actually been mind-controlled, then he needed to save her.

A superior who put on a high and mighty face but did not save his subordinates while they were in trouble was not fit to be a leader.

Ainz was his subjects' ruler, and he had to protect them.

"Then, do you know where Shalltear is? Have you pinpointed her location?"

"My sincerest apologies, but we have not confirmed that yet. I considered that Shalltear might attack Nazarick, so I had her direct subordinates placed under arrest, and dispatched other vassals to reinforce the 1st Floor."

"Really now. Then, let's go visit your elder sister to see if we can divine Shalltear's location."

## Part 2

The 5th floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick was an extremely cold region that had been modelled after a glacier.

A bluish-white iceberg stood in the middle of an endless expanse of white land, like a tombstone. It seemed to glow from within and confused the senses. Snow fell from the heavy, overcast sky above, whipped into a mad dance by the freezing wind which carried frozen vapors on its gusts. In the distance was a frozen forest covered in snow, which looked like giants clad in robes of purest white.

The bone-chilling wind ruffled Ainz's clothing, which fluttered in the wind. Albedo stood beside him, and as he eyed the way she was dressed, Ainz asked:

"Aren't you cold? If you need to, you can put on your armor. We should still have time for that."

Ainz was completely immune to all forms of cold-elemental attacks. He would not be chilled or frozen regardless of how low the temperature went. However, Albedo was a different matter. If she was in her full battle order, mere freezing gusts like this would not harm her, but she was currently in a white dress. He had asked her about this before teleporting, but he had come away with the feeling that she was just trying to put on a brave front.

However, Ainz simply smiled gently in response to Ainz's worries.

"Thank you for your concern, Ainz-sama, but it is not necessary. Mere cold like this is not a problem."

Ainz nodded and replied, "I see."

Normally, there would be an environmental effect here which applied cold damage and slowed movement. However, operating it required money, so it had been left deactivated. Perhaps she had simply been lucky that they had made that decision early on. Or was it because Albedo had some sort of magic item or skill that negated cold damage?

In truth, the NPCs were equipped by the guild members who designed them. There were only a few of them which Ainz could confidently say he understood thoroughly, apart from Pandora's Actor. That said, he had gone over all their data after coming to this new world.

Questions filled Ainz's mind as he looked at the majestic two-story mansion before him.

This building seemed strangely out of place in this frozen land. It was like a house from a storybook, and seemed to be surrounded by a fairytale atmosphere.

However, its surface was covered in a layer of ice, giving it an uncomfortably cold aura. In fact, the name of this building was about as far from a fairytale as one could get.

Its name was the Frozen Prison.

All of Nazarick's enemies were locked up here.

"Let's go."

With those simple words, Ainz pushed open the frozen main gate. Though it was covered in a thick layer of ice, the gate still opened easily, as though it were welcoming a visitor.

A wave of cold air washed over them in the instant the gate opened. This was because the interior of the Prison was colder than even the freezing environs outside.

It was only after the chilling wind swept over her that Albedo began shivering. As Ainz saw this, he reached into his pocket dimension and withdrew a crimson cape, whose hem was decorated with flame-like patterns.

“Wear this, Albedo. It is not highly enchanted, but it should be enough to ward off the cold.”

“To think you would lavish such a gift upon me! My deepest thanks! I shall treasure it all my life.”

Ainz had not said that he would give it to her, but after seeing Albedo’s radiant smile, Ainz could not muster up any words, but instead looked to the other side of the opened gate.

A silent, dark passage extended within.

“Right, the surviving members of the Sunlight Scripture should be in here.”

“Yes. Neuronist should be watching them closely. Ah, how warm, it feels like Ainz-sama is hugging me… kukuku.”

“...Really now. That’s wonderful.”

*I doubt being embraced by skinless, fleshless arms like mine would feel warm,* but of course Ainz did not say that. At the very least, he knew that it would not be appropriate at the present moment.

As Albedo wriggled and twisted around in the cape, wrapping it around herself so tightly she almost vanished into its folds, Ainz strode forth.

“What are you doing, we’re running out of time… under these circumstances”

“Ah, ah yes!”

Ainz’s passive skill [Undead Blessing] allowed him to sense all the undead lurking within the compound. Since it was annoying, Ainz disabled the skill in order to ignore the presence of the undead as he walked down the freezing, blue-white passage. People without countermeasures against movement impairment might end up tripping and falling on the completely frozen-over corridor.

“...Ainz-sama, shall I summon Neuronist? It is unthinkable that she would not come to lead the way, thus forcing the supreme overlord of Nazarick to advance by himself…”

“It’s fine. Though it’s not a bad thing, she talks too much. There is a matter we need to settle as soon as possible and I would like to avoid wasting time.”

“Understood. Then, after all this is over, I will lecture Neuronist and caution her not to babble too much.”

“No, no, no need for that. It does not displease me.”

“But…”

Ainz smiled bitterly as he watched Albedo furrow her brows from her place beside him. As her master, he appreciated the fact that she was thinking of him, but if she did that, his subordinates might not dare complain in future.

“It is fine. I love you all, regardless of your merits or flaws, because you were all made by my friends of the past. The fault is mine for being unhappy with such meticulously crafted people.”

Indeed, if Shalltear had betrayed them because her backstory had been designed that way, then he had to forgive her for it. That was because she was simply obeying the will of her creator, Peroroncino. However, he did not seem like the type who would plant bad seeds in the guild. All this confused Ainz, because Peroroncino was a man who liked joking around and disliked ruining relationships between his friends.

*If that's the case, then it should be an external reason after all, no? The way the text was displayed represents that she was mind-controlled… although I can't rule out the fact that it might have been a part of her settings I wasn't sure about, or a change in her settings which happened after coming to this world. Besides, I didn't memorize the personality profiles of all the NPCs, and their personalities seem quite similar to those of their creators… I guess nobody could program them without personalities, so that might be why. If that's the case, then Shalltear… could it be that she had something like a time bomb built into her settings? Her creator liked H-Games, so maybe he programmed some kind of event into her which needed to be solved with a walkthrough… uwah, that sounds quite likely.*

Ainz sighed weakly, and then he finally realised the oddity in the behavior of the woman next to him.

She was looking forward and walking, but unlike just now, she was not matching his stride. And while her eyes were facing forward, they were not focused on any particular place.

Ainz heard Albedo mumbling something, and he strained to listen.

"I love you… I love you… I love you…"

She was repeating those words over and over again, like a broken record.

"...Oi, Albedo. I said I loved you *all*. That refers to everyone, right?"

Albedo turned her head toward him in a strange manner.

“But, but that, that means, you love me too, right?”

“Er… erm… well, yes.”

“Kufu!!”

Albedo squeezed her legs together and hopped up in an adorable manner — the motion sending her into the ceiling.

Such was the case when one possessed superhuman athletic ability.

*Ping!* Or rather, it was a *boom*. A startling crash came from the ceiling, so great was the force of the impact. As they heard what sounded like a bomb exploding, the translucent bodies of several incorporeal monsters poked themselves out of the ceiling.

These were the undead which were hiding within the Prison, which Ainz’s skill had picked up.

“Ah, you lot can go back, it’s nothing special.”

Ainz looked at Albedo before him, so happy that she was humming to herself. Though she had crashed into the ceiling, her racial skills included a certain measure of damage reduction, so it had not hurt at all.

The various undead bowed reverently before vanishing, returning to where they stood ready to meet any intruders.

“...Albedo, we’re almost at your big sister’s room. Are you ready?”

Albedo’s flighty and overjoyed expression turned serious in an instant.

“Understood. Then, I shall retrieve the doll.”

“Umu. Give it to me.”

Albedo reached a hand toward the wall, and a pale-white hand reached back out, depositing a doll to her hand. It was a baby doll, which was about the same size as an actual baby.

Ainz accepted the doll, and looked it over without averting his eyes.

“How revolting.”

The doll was a caricature of a human infant, its distorted features resembling a Cupid doll. Its large, round eyes were particularly disgusting. Ainz furrowed his nonexistent brows and directed his gaze to the end of the corridor. There was a large fresco there, painted on a wall which contained a door.

He saw a mother and her baby. It was a painting of a mother gently cradling her child.

If that were all, it would have been a beautiful painting. However, the passage of time had worn away at the paint, turning it into a hideous sight. In particular, one could no longer see the shape of the baby itself. All that remained was something which looked like a corpse.

Ainz pushed open the door, which slid open with no sound or resistance — and he was greeted by the sound of crying babies.

It was not just the sound of one or two voices. Nor was it the result of an echo.

Tens, hundreds of crying voices fused into one and reached Ainz’s ears. However, he could not see any babies in the room.

Still, although he could not see them, they were definitely there.

In this empty room, bare of all furniture, there was a cradle, and a woman gently rocked it.

Though Ainz had entered the room, the woman in the black mourning clothes remained silent, caring only for the cradle she was rocking. Her face could not be seen because her long black hair completely covered it up.

Normally, if an NPC saw a Supreme Being (Ainz) and paid him no heed, Albedo would loudly rebuke them. However, she remained silent. Ainz knew the reason for that, because Albedo's guarded stance told him everything.

“It's about time to begin, no?”

“It should be. Please be careful.”

As though on cue, the woman's movements froze. Then, she reached her hands into the cradle, and gently retrieved the baby within. No, that was not a real baby, but a baby doll.

“It's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong.”

She shook it forcefully and then cast it aside with all her strength. The doll shattered into pieces when it hit the wall.

“My baby, my baby, my baby, my babyyyyyyy—!”

A sound of grinding teeth came from the woman, and with that, the crying noises from the floor and ceiling grew louder. Soon, the source of the sound revealed itself, and lumps of flesh which resembled translucent babies emerged.

“To think Tabula Smaragdina-san put so many monsters in here… how much money did he spend on this?”

These squirming masses of flesh which resembled infants were close to level 20, and they were called Carrion Babies.

In games like YGGDRASIL, one could place pop monsters within dungeons by paying the appropriate in-game or real-world currency. However, they would not come back to life after being destroyed, so they were more of a luxury to players. Those players that did not focus on roleplaying would not emplace such monsters.

The fact that he had put in so many Carrion Babies here, despite their low levels, was a testament to the meticulous nature of Tabula Smaragdina.

Just as Ainz was starting to be impressed, the woman produced a large pair of scissors from *somewhere* and gripped them tightly. A keen gaze looked out from her unkempt hair, directed at Ainz and Albedo.

“You, you, you, you, took, took, took, took, my baby, my baby, my baby, my babyyyyyyyyy—!”

“...She really is your sister. The resemblance is very strong.”

“Eh?! Re-really?”

The woman seemed to take the leisurely conversation as some sort of provocation and broke into a run, her killing intent driving her as swiftly as the wind. The woman in the black mourning clothes took unnaturally large strides as she charged, closing the distance to them in but a few steps.

The woman stabbed forcefully at Ainz with her scissors—

“Your child is here.”

—And as Ainz presented the doll to the woman, her movements froze immediately, as though someone had pressed the stop button on her. She put her scissors away, and slowly accepted the doll.

“Ohhhhh~”

She cradled her beloved child with infinite compassion, as though she would never let it go. Then, she gingerly placed the baby back in the cradle, before turning her face, shrouded as it was by her long hair, to Ainz and Albedo:

“Momonga-sama, and my lovely little sister. I trust you have been well?”

“It’s been a while, Nigredo. You seem… yes, I am glad you have not changed.”

The reason why Ainz could calmly handle this chain of events was because he had witnessed this madness before, in the game.

*Back then, I was so scared that I screamed.*

His guildmate said he had made a new NPC, and asked the other guild members to come see it with him. In the end, everyone had shrieked together and unleashed their full power on Nigredo. It felt quite nostalgic now when he looked back on it.

“Nee-san, it’s been a while.”

Indeed, this Nigredo was Albedo’s older sister. In other words, she was an NPC created by the player Tabula Smaragdina.

If one said that Albedo was the incarnation of his love for gap moe, then Nigredo would be the character that represented Tabula Smaragdina's love for horror movies.

*Although he wasn't a bad person by any stretch of the word, he was clearly quite a character.*

Under normal circumstances, he was a rational man, but the more he got into something, the more he began revealing his true nature. As he recalled that guild member from the past, Nigredo brushed away the long hair which covered her face, revealing her true visage.

Perhaps she felt that covering her face was being disrespectful to Ainz, but on the other hand, he would have preferred her to carry on as normal.

Her true face was creepy, to say the least. It had no skin, only exposed muscle.

Her mouth had no lips, yet held a beautiful set of teeth. Her eyes shone brightly in the absence of eyelids. An observer might think her beautiful if they looked solely at her eyes or teeth, but taken as a whole, her face inspired nothing but revulsion.

That frighteningly ugly face from the depths of a horror movie contorted. It was hard to tell because of the lack of skin, but she still had muscle tissue on her face, unlike Ainz, so one could eventually surmise that she should have been smiling.

"Then, Momonga-sama, how may I—"

"—Ah, my apologies. You were not in the Throne Room so you did not know, but my name is no longer Momonga. I am now Ainz Ooal Gown. Please address me as Ainz from now on."

There was a gasp of surprise, and then Nigredo slowly raised her head:

"I understand, Ainz-sama."

"Then, Nigredo, I came here to seek your help. Could I make use of your abilities?"

"My abilities? Is it alive? Or unliving?"

"...Probably counts as alive… should probably be living… I'll tell you straight up, the target is Shalltear Bloodfallen."

"The Floor Guardian? ...Forgive my rudeness. If it your order, then I will carry it out at once, Ainz-sama."

Though her voice seemed doubtful, Nigredo immediately complied with the request.

"Please, Nee-san."

In response to Albedo's request, Nigredo raised her thumb playfully before casting a variety of spells. There was quite the variety of them, and Ainz mused that he had heard most of them not long before. They were the spells he had demonstrated to Narberal last night.

Nigredo was a magic caster, and she was one of the highest-level NPCs in Nazarick. Though one could not tell from looking at her, she had been designed to specialize in divination and information gathering. That was why Ainz had come here to ask for help with locating Shalltear.

Soon enough — as befitting a person with her skills — Nigredo swiftly announced the results.

“Found her.”

“Put it on a [Crystal Monitor].”

She cast another spell, and a [Crystal Monitor] appeared, displaying something which looked like a vast expanse of forest. Someone in armor was standing amidst the trees.

Ainz praised her:

“Amazing. You discerned the location of the target with pinpoint accuracy. I’d expect nothing less of a specialized magic cas—”

As the image in the monitor became clearer, the praise vanished.

The person depicted there was dressed in a suit of red-colored full plate armor which looked like it had been drenched in blood. It wore a swan-shaped helmet which left only the face exposed. Plumes of avian feathers sprouted from either side of the helmet, while the chest and shoulders of the armor had been styled into the shape of wings. Crimson skirt armor covered the lower body.

It held a huge, strange-looking lance in one hand, resembling a pipette one might use in a science class.

This was Shalltear Bloodfallen. She possessed levels in Valkyrie — a divine magic caster class which specialized in fighting power — fully ready for battle.

“The Spuit Lance! That’s the divine-class item that Peroroncino-sama gave Shalltear!” Albedo exclaimed as she saw Shalltear’s weapon.

Ainz had enough divine-class items that he could equip them to every slot on his body. However, this did not mean that they were easy to come by.

YGGDRASIL’s magic items were made by embedding data crystals into items, but not all data crystals dropped by monsters were equal. If one wanted to make a divine-class item, one would need several data crystals which were classified as “high-rare drops”. In addition, one would need to make the container for those data crystals — a sword, for instance — out of extremely rare metals and the like.

As a result, it was fairly common for even level 100 players to not own a single divine-class item.

Even the members of Ainz Ooal Gown — a guild which had ranked among the top 10 in the game — could not outfit their NPCs in nothing but divine-class items. At the most, they could only give them one or two such articles.

The Spuit Lance which Shalltear Bloodfallen possessed was such an item.

Its name sounded silly, but its power was extremely insidious. When embedded in a weapon, some data crystals allowed their user to absorb a certain percentage of damage dealt and use it to replenish their health. The Spuit Lance was specialized in doing so.

“...Let’s head out now.”

“Eh? Ah, please wait! Since Shalltear is already fully equipped, it’s possible that hostilities will begin on sight, so we need to select several guards to defend your person.”

“We don’t have time for that; if negotiations break down, we’ll retreat immediately—”

“『Forgive the disturbance, Ainz-sama.』”

A female voice echoed through his mind. It belonged to Narberal, who had stayed in E-Rantel.

Anger blazed in Ainz at this untimely interruption.

“What is it, Narberal? I’m—”

*I’m busy,* he wanted to say, but Ainz cut himself off halfway.

This was because he recalled how he had interrupted Entoma’s [Message] last night. At the time, he had felt that it could not be helped, but perhaps if he had taken action immediately, the present situation might be different. This was because he could have handed the task of saving Nfirea to Narberal.

This faint sense of regret allowed Ainz to regain his calm.

The NPCs treated Ainz as their supreme overlord. Even if he made the wrong decision, they would still treat Ainz’s words as their top priority. Because of that, Ainz had to keep calm, act carefully, and avoid making mistakes.

*That’s a bit much to ask of an ordinary person like me...*

As he inwardly laughed at his own flawed judgement, Ainz smiled bitterly as he concluded that it was most likely impossible for him. Then, he felt Narberal’s subservient attitude through the [Message], waiting for her master’s instructions, and his body trembled like he had been struck by lightning.

*What am I thinking? I am Ainz Ooal Gown, the ruler of Nazarick, the man who took on the name of everyone else. Indeed, I am not Suzuki Satoru. Impossible? No, now that I've taken on this name, I have to turn the impossible into the possible.*

"...No, it's fine. What is it? It must be important for you to contact me with [Message], right?"

"『Yes. Someone from the Adventurer's Guild is looking for you, Ainz-sama.』"

"...If it's about last night, tell them to wait… no, that's not right. There should be something else, am I correct?"

"『Yes! You are as perceptive as always, Ainz-sama.』"

Narberal was not being clear, so Ainz let his silence show his confusion. Soon, she seemed to have picked up on that and spoke again:

"『Actually, there is another problem besides that. It… concerns a certain Vampire.』"

"What? A Vampire, you say?"

Ainz turned to look at Shalltear, whose image stood ramrod straight on the monitor.

"Did they mention anything about that Vampire? Like say, silver hair, or crimson armor, or something?"

"『Regretfully, they did not. The person they sent for yourself was little more than a runner. They said that they would explain at the guild, and hoped that you would hurry over as soon as possible, Ainz-sama. I hear that several adventurer teams have already made their way there… the Guild’s messenger is nearby; what should I tell him?』”

Ainz closed his eyes. Of course, he had no eyeballs, so it simply meant that the lights in his eyesockets vanished.

“What do you think of Narberal’s [Message], Albedo?”

After finishing his explanation, Albedo lowered her eyes for a few moments, and then looked back at Ainz.

“Given that we lack information, there will be merits and demerits to either alternative. Thus, you should select according to your personal preference, Ainz-sama. If it were up to me, I would ignore these humans.”

After thanking Albedo, Ainz fell into deep thought.

He considered the worst that could happen if he prioritized Shalltear.

He then considered how Shalltear’s situation would change if he put the Guild first.

As he thought about the drawbacks of both, he began to feel that either option would lead to the worst-case scenario.

If his friends were with him, he could probably use the majority vote to make a decision. But his friends were not with him. As the man who had taken charge of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, as the man who had taken its mighty name for his own, he had to make that choice himself.

After a brief period of hesitation, Ainz came to a conclusion.

“Albedo, send someone to keep an eye on Shalltear. I will go visit the Guild in E-Rantel. After that matter is concluded, take me to Shalltear.”

“Understood.”

“You heard that too, didn’t you, Narberal?”

“『Understood. Then, I shall inform the messenger that you will be on your way.』”

“Ah, yes, tell him that. Then, Albedo, forgive me, but I shall be heading to the Guild now.”

“I understand. I shall send several vassals out, in accordance with your instructions.”

“Please do. Also, I will hand the ring over to Yuri. Take it from her afterwards.”

In truth, there was something he wanted to hand to the Head Librarian, but Ainz felt that he no longer had that time, so he teleported himself with the power of the ring.

Now that only the two sisters were left in the room, the mood in the room lightened. As though waiting for this opportunity, Nigredo turned to Albedo, a curious look in her eyes.

“What’s wrong? Has something happened to Shalltear?”

“Mm, it seems she has rebelled against us.”

“...Unbelievable… How could that be… is it really true?”

“I find it hard to believe myself, but that seems to be the case.”

“Then she should be eliminated without delay. But... it seems that is not what Ainz-sama wishes to do?”

“Indeed. Because of Ainz-sama’s boundless mercy… no, he probably thinks that killing her without realising why she turned against us would be a big mistake. I’m sure that is what Ainz-sama has in mind.”

“Hm~” Nigredo mused, in a tone that seemed somewhere between acceptance and denial.

“I understand. Before you send the vassals out to keep an eye on Shalltear, I will continue my magical surveillance from here.”

“I’m grateful for that, Nee-san.”

Thinking the conversation was over, Albedo was about to unleash the power of her Ring when she sensed that her older sister still had something to say. When Nigredo was in a rational state of mind, she was the sort of person who would speak openly, so there was only one reason that Albedo’s big sister would hesitate like this.

Although she did not want to inquire about it, when she considered that it might not be about the previous matter, she had to ask, however unwillingly.

“What’s the matter, Nee-san?”

“...Since I am not permitted to leave this Frozen Prison, I am unsure about the situation outside. Is Spinel still well?”

*...As I thought.*

Albedo regretted asking as she thought that, but in an even voice, she replied:

“Nee-san, you call her that…”

“I hate that girl. Even if we were all characters made by Tabula Smaragdina-sama… no, Spinel was made in a completely different way from us. She is not the kind of person to whom people could open their hearts.”

“That’s not the case, Nee-san. She’s adorable.”

“All I can think is that you have been deceived by her. Spinel will definitely bring a great disaster to Nazarick someday. I’ll wager on that.”

“...We will never see eye to eye on that point. I believe that girl will not cause any trouble.”

“Really now. Well, if you — if the Guardian Overseer feels that way, then there’s nothing left for me to say. However, I hope that you will take my concerns into consideration, in your role as the Guardian Overseer.”

“I understand. I will take your words to heart, Nee-san.”

Resisting the urge to sigh, Albedo teleported elsewhere.

However, the matter which she could have laughed off usually now stuck in her heart like a thorn.

She felt that everyone created by the Supreme Beings was staunchly loyal to them. Yet, Shalltear had still rebelled against them. If that were the case, anyone else might be next.

For all she knew, her little sister might also betray—

She could not erase these thoughts entirely. Yet, to Albedo, this was not necessarily a bad thing.

Albedo had a baffled, confused look on her face as she reached her destination.

“Ainz-sama, my beloved, I am your loyal dog, your slave.”

She declaimed her feelings to a man who was not there.

“Even if all of Nazarick turns against you, I will always stand by your side.”

## Part 3

“Come, come, come, Momon-san, pull up a chair.”

There were six men in the room. Three of them were stout-looking men girt for war, while one of them looked similarly imposing despite his lack of arms or armor. He was the one who had risen to beckon Ainz over. In addition, there was a skinny, neurotic-looking man in a robe, and finally a fat man seated in the innermost part of the room.

Ainz took a seat, under the eyes of everyone else, and then the standing man spoke once more.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am the head of this city’s Adventurer’s Guild, Pluton Ainzach.”

He was a powerful-looking middle-aged man.

He had an aura of a mighty veteran about him. There was no doubt that he was an excellent warrior.

“This is the Mayor of E-Rantel, Panasolei Gruuze De Rittenmeier-san.”

Ainz nodded, and Panasolei waved slightly in response.

He was fat — no, frankly speaking, he was almost entirely made up of fat. His belly was rounded and flabby, and his chins were overflowing with adipose tissue. The excess of fat made him look like a bulldog.

The hair on his head was sparse enough that his scalp reflected the light, and what little hair which was left had already turned white.

“Momon-san, pleased to meet you.”

Perhaps it was because his nose was stuffed up, but he made *buhiiii* noises when he spoke.

“And this is the leader of the E-Rantel Magician’s Guild, Theo Rakesheer.”

The skinny man — who looked as frail as a bamboo pole and seemed at least somewhat anorexic — nodded to Ainz.

“And these three are much like yourself, members of the adventurer teams which are the pride of E-Rantel. From the right to the left are Igvarge-san of Kralgra, Perote-san of Tenrou and Moknak-san of Rainbow.”

Those three men each had metal plates around the necks — made of mithril — and each gave the impression of being commanding and even powerful. Their equipment was nothing more than junk to Ainz, but they were still far above the gear sported by most adventurers in this city.

Each of them had different looks in their eyes, but they all shared the same common thread of curiosity.

One of them — the representative of Kralgra, Igvarge — glared icily at Ainz and asked:

"Before that, there's something I'd like to ask you, Guildmaster Ainzach. I've never heard of the name Momon before. Since he's a mithril-plate, he should have done something noteworthy, right?"

There seemed to be a little hostility in his voice. However, Ainzach seemed to pay it no heed and cheerfully replied:

"His feats include taming the Wise King of the Forest, as well as settling the graveyard incident last night."

"Graveyard incident?"

Unlike the confused Igvarge, Moknak of "Rainbow" exclaimed in surprise.

"You don't mean the incident concerning appearance of vast quantities of undead?"

"*Buhiii*~ you're quite well informed. I instructed that the matter not be made public due to receiving some troubling news. Where did you hear that from?"

His words were frequently accompanied by a *buhiii*, probably due to a blocked nose or some other reason. Nor was there much intonation, probably because he was using his mouth to breathe. It made his words sound strange, as though he were reading off a script.

"Forgive me, Mayor. I merely overheard this, so it's difficult for me to tell you where exactly the news came from. In addition, I do not know much of the details."

The two of them looked at each other and they smiled as their eyes met. Moknak's smile was forced, while the Mayor's was uneasy.

"Hm~ it rings false to me, but forget it. There should be a lot of people who know about the undead running wild. *Buhiii*~ forgive me, I interrupted by accident."

"It's fine, Mayor. In any case, the Guild concluded that due to his contributions in that incident, Momon-san is a mithril-ranked adventurer."

"Just one incident? Just by handling one matter? No adventurer who's gone through rank placement examinations would be happy with that, am I wrong?"

He was not even pretending to be polite any more. Igvarge displayed his naked aggression on his face, and then someone spoke coldly from the side.

“Hmph. Frankly speaking, I have to say that I’m not happy about Momon-dono’s mithril rank either, Guildmaster.”

The man who cut in was the head of the Magician’s Guild, Rakesheer. There was a derisive expression on his face, though Ainz understood that it was not directed at himself, but at Igvarge. However, Igvarge did not realise this, and smiled at Rakesheer in a friendly way.

“I’m glad you see it my way, Guildmaster-san.”

“Ku, kuku.”

Rakesheer’s lips grew even thinner, as though he had heard something amusing. It was not a friendly gesture, because he had a scornful look in his eyes.

“Is that so? I feel that our views are diametrically opposed.”

“What do you mean by—”

“Really, that’s enough out of you, Igvarge-kun. There’s people in the Guild who feel Momon-kun was worthy of an orichalcum plate.”

“What?!”

Igvarge’s face seemed to be asking how that was possible.

As he saw it, Rakesheer’s mocking smile grew so wide that it twisted his entire face.

“Momon-san broke through a horde of thousands of undead with just his partner — no, he had the Wise King of the Forest as well, for a total of three people — and defeated the people conducting an unholy ritual.”

“—Anyone with some stealth training could do that!”

Rakesheer sighed, in a somewhat exaggerated way.

“Indeed, you are correct. Initially, I felt that this was not enough to qualify Momon-san for orichalcum rank. However, the discovery of a set of bones bore testament to Momon-san’s might.”

At that point, Rakesheer turned to Ainz in his suit of black full plate armor, a stern look in his eyes.

“...That is to say, the bones of a Skeletal Dragon. Momon-san slew a frightening undead creature that possessed absolute resistance to magic."

"Well, uh, yes! Skel-skeletal Dragons are strong! But mithril-ranked adventurers can still def—"

"—Can still defeat two of them at the same time?"

"Say what?!"

Igvarge's gasp of surprise was joined by the other two adventurers. Then, there was a subtle shift in their attitude as they looked toward him. They were like inspectors trying to plumb the depths of a lake.

"We found the remains of two Skeletal Dragons at the scene. Could your teams break through a horde of thousands of undead, slay two Skeletal Dragons, and kill the hitherto unknown masterminds of this conspiracy in such a short time? Other adventurers were present at the graveyard, and they reported the presence of twisted spirits like Wraiths. Could you have penetrated such deadly ground?"

Igvarge bit his lip, unable to respond.

"Then, let me ask you another question. I hear that the only other member of Momon-san's party is a woman. She is a magic caster, which means that she would have been completely useless against Skeletal Dragons and their complete magic immunity. Under these circumstances, with only one other… no, even with the Wise King of the Forest by your side as well, could you have made such a great accomplishment?"

Rakesheer bowed to Ainz and said:

"Please allow me to thank you on behalf of the city, Momon-san. If not for your swift response, many more lives might have been lost. And while I can only speak for myself in this matter, you have but to come to me with any request you have and I will do my best to fulfil it."

"You praise me too highly, Guildmaster. I was simply fulfilling Bareare-san's request, and I solved a problem along the way."

"Fufufufu…"

Rakesheer laughed, and there was an undercurrent of respect amidst his laughter.

"It seems you are truly worthy of an orichalcum… no, an adamantite rank. To think someone could take such a mighty accomplishment and pass it off which such humility, as though it were nothing of note. I heard that your companion can use magic of the 3rd tier as well… is that correct?”

“Your praise honors me… but I do not wish to casually show my hand.”

“Is that so? What a shame.”

Igvarge’s face and ears turned red as he watched the way Ainz and Rakesheer spoke lightly to each other. Then, he bellowed:

“We could do the same thing if we got everyone together! Besides, it’s his fault that he’s got so few teammates, right? He can’t get anyone because he’s no good!”

The air in the room grew tense even as it grew frigid, and then the sound of a *buhiii~* rang forth.

“Let’s leave the matter at that. We didn’t gather everyone here to fight now, did we?”

After that last *buhiii~*, Igvarge sat down, seemingly deflated. However, he still glared hatefully at Ainz. The two guild leaders watched this sight and shook their heads helplessly.

“I understand that you all value strength, but that is not the topic we are here to address, so why don’t we settle the matter quickly?”

“Thank you, Mayor.”

“Muu? I have no idea why you would thank me, but you should probably continue speaking. The fact is, I’m not quite sure what is going on.”

“Understood. If only I could have reported it right away…”

“Don’t worry, I was handling a matter in connection with Stronoff-kun myself.”

There was another *buhiii~*

“Now then, let’s get to the point—”

“Before that, shouldn’t we show some basic courtesy and remove our helmets?”

Igvarge cut in once more with a mocking words. He was not incorrect in saying so, but he was also being quite annoying. The other adventurers frowned as well.

"It's fine. This time, he has a point. I have been somewhat rude."

However, the false face Ainz revealed when he removed his helmet was a plain one, which was not particularly attractive.

"Since I come from another country, I wore my helmet to avoid drawing trouble. Please forgive my lack of manners."

"Cheh, so you're a foreigner."

"Shut up, Igvarge. Adventurers protect all humanity from monsters and as such, borders do not exist for them. As a fellow adventurer, I am ashamed at your griping about the unspoken rules which govern our guild."

As the voice castigating Igvarge's second interruption rang forth, he realised that everyone else in the room felt that way, so he reluctantly fell silent.

"...Well, it's because of this sort of thing that people have loaded opinions of foreigners."

Several of the people smiled bitterly at Ainz's words. Igvarge's own face had turned from pale to almost white, but by the time Ainz put his helmet on again, there was no complaint.

"Then, I hope we won't get sidetracked any further. Let's get right to it."

"Well, it's because someone was late that we haven't heard about anything until now."

"That was a mistake on my part. Please forgive me."

Ainz lowered his head in apology. He had experienced this sort of thing before as a salaryman, where his bosses announced that they would only begin once everyone had arrived. Thus, all he could do was suppress the urge to go home, because he truly understood how they felt.

Ainz's sincere apology made him seem that much more noble, in contrast to Igvarge's hostility and constant jibes. Igvarge scoffed angrily as his scowl deepened, because he was well aware that the general opinion of him had fallen even further.

However, there was someone who was even angrier than Igvarge.

"...Are you quite done yet? One more interruption and you can get your ass out of here."

As expected, it was Ainzach who had spoken up. His eyes were filled with rage, and there was no trace of his previous calm in his voice. Naturally, he was glaring at Igvarge.

Igvarge inclined his head slightly to apologize.

Ainz was confused as he observed Igvarge's reaction. Given the hostility the man had shown him just now, it would not have been strange for him to break into a grade-schooler's tantrum, as though complaining to his parents. Why had he chosen to back down?

After a brief period of thought, he came up with something.

What would people think of Igvarge if he were chased away from a gathering of mithril-ranked adventurers? Even if the truth got out, there would be some people who would believe that he had been ejected from the group because he was useless. If that happened, his standing within the adventuring community would plummet. That was probably why he had shut up.

"To summarize, about two nights ago, some adventurers patrolling the outskirts of E-Rantel encountered a Vampire. Five of them were killed by the Vampire. I have gathered all of you here because of that incident."

As he listened to the description of the Vampire, Ainz's hopes shattered like spun glass.

The sole surviving adventurer had been too afraid to give a proper description, and had only noted details like clothing, hair color, and the like. However, the thing that had stood out most clearly was "silver hair and a large mouth".

Even if it was just a muddled description, anyone who knew Shalltear would immediately think of her once they heard it. Ainz was certain of the Vampire's identity in his heart.

*I have no idea how things ended up like this, but things might go badly if I don't alter the memories of the survivor. I'll have to do that some other time.*

As Ainz furrowed his illusionary eyebrows, the discussion continued apace.

"I see. I'm not too clear about this incident myself, but I would be wasting everyone's time if I asked for a full explanation. I'll ask if anything I don’t understand comes up.”

“Understood. Then, gentlemen, do you have any questions?”

“When you say ‘the outskirts’, where exactly do you mean by that?”

“It’s a place about three hours’ walk from the north gate. There’s a large patch of forest there, and the incident took place within the forest.”

“What rank were those adventurers?”

“They were iron-plates.”

“...I’d like to ask, but why have you brought so many adventurers on board for just one Vampire? Is there going to be a competition of some sort?”

“He’s got a point. Platinum-ranked adventurers can deal with a Vampire. I have no idea why you’ve gathered so many mithril-ranked adventurers.”

“The answer for that is simple: because that Vampire is very powerful.”

Everyone looked to Rakesheer in surprise as he interrupted.

“A very powerful Vampire…”

“Could it be you’re trying to say that the opposition is a high-end Vampire… the Vampire Lord ‘Landfall’ who was mentioned in the Saga of the Thirteen Heroes?”

“We do not know if the enemy is indeed a Vampire Lord, but according to the adventurer who encountered the Vampire, the Vampire used the 3rd-tier spell [Create Undead]. I trust I don’t need to tell you adventurers the implications of that?”

They had nothing to say. The stiff looks on their faces spoke for them.

“Hm~ I have no idea what that means, so could you tell me?”

“Forgive me, Mayor-san.”

“Anything which could use magic of that tier is of platinum-rank at the very least.”

Panasolei frowned as he began getting a better picture of the situation.

“In other words… I won’t speak like this any more.”

Panasolei’s eyes sharpened, and just that was enough to change the image he projected to everyone else. He had turned from a fat, lazy pig to a savage wild boar. Or rather, this was Panasolei's true face.

"In other words, it's exactly as what you're saying, Guildmaster-san. A monster on par with a platinum-ranked adventurer party, with platinum-ranked powers on top of that."

"It is as you say."

"So it's basically strengthening something which is already strong?"

"That is a valid way of looking at the matter."

"How would you describe it, in terms of the size of a comparable military force?"

"A military force… that's a somewhat tricky question."

Rakesheer racked his brains, and then spoke again.

"Let me get this out of the way first, this is just my personal opinion and it's by no means a final, unassailable assessment. If you want to think of it in terms of a group of fighting men, given the fact that the undead do not tire, nor do they eat or drink… I guess you could compare it to an army of ten thousand."

"Say what?!"

A look of shock came over Panasolei as he heard this, and he looked to the other adventurers, as though seeking their opinion of those words. Apart from Ainz, everyone nodded in agreement with the words of the Magician's Guild's leader.

As though picking up the baton from Rakesheer, Ainzach continued speaking:

"To continue where Theo left off, only about 20% of the adventurers in the Kingdom can be considered to be at or above platinum-rank. There are around 3000 adventurers in the Kingdom, so among the 8 million people of the Kingdom, there are only about 600 platinum-ranked or higher adventurers. Do you understand now? Platinum-ranked adventurers are that rare."

"Is that so. I wish I did not understand, but I do. Then, with this situation in mind, I would like to ask you adventurers: are you confident in eliminating this creature? If not… well, then how about asking the Warrior-Captain Gazef-kun for help?"

Gazef Stronoff. He was the mightiest warrior of the Kingdom, superior even to adamantite-ranked adventurers. A man that was arguably the Kingdom's ace in the hole.

However, Ainzach immediately shot that proposal down.

"It may be true that no warrior is capable of beating Stronoff-dono. However, if Stronoff-dono faced a party of adventurers that was weaker than himself, the victors would undoubtedly be the adventurers. This is because adventuring parties have many methods of attack and defense — to continue the example of using Stronoff-san, the party can use four times the amount of magic and martial arts as Stronoff-san. The impact of this difference is particularly marked when facing monsters who possess unique special abilities."

"Umu…"

"The ideal solution would be to recruit orichalcum and adamantite-ranked adventurers for this. But before it comes to that, I would like the strongest adventurers in our city to set up a defensive line to keep the Vampire from invading us."

"That would be giving up the initiative, don't you think?"

"That *is* the best possible outcome of the worst-case scenario. Need I remind you that our foe is a one-man army?"

"I… I don't want to imagine the terror facing such a fearsome foe would entail…"

One could follow an army of ten thousand by their tracks and evade them easily. In addition, prodigious quantities of supplies would be needed to keep such an army on the march, so it would be difficult for them to do battle for long.

However, what if that army was compressed into a single person? And what if that person was able to use [Invisibility] or was adept at covert operations?

"Still, as an adventurer, I have to say that forming a defensive line will be very difficult, Guildmaster-dono. After all, coordinating our teams will need a fair bit of training time…"

"Well, in lieu of that, what do you think of everyone just deploying together?"

The adventurers promptly shot down the Mayor’s proposal.

“I doubt that would be possible. In order to work as closely as that, we’ll need to craft intricate battle plans, but the more complex the plan, the more likely it will go awry when something unexpected occurs. Rather than risk that, it would be better to not work together and just operate independently. Speaking of which, why did that Vampire appear there? What news does the Guild have about it?”

“About that… since the enemy is a powerful Vampire, the Guild does not have the full details on it at the moment. Just as we were about to put a scouting party together, the incident from last night occurred, which dispersed our forces.”

“...I see. So you’re worried that these two incidents are linked?”

“Indeed, that is so.”

“Didn’t Momon-shi take care of the graveyard incident? Was there anything on the bodies of the masterminds that would tie the two events together?”

That question plunged the room into a brief silence.

Ainz was puzzled. The Adventurer’s Guildmaster — who had fielded answers without any hesitation — now turned to the Mayor, a questioning look in his eyes. Still, when one thought about it, this was information pertaining to the criminals that had conducted a terror attack on the city. There were things which could and could not be said to adventurers.

“From their belongings, we learned the enemy was from Zuranon.”

The faces of the three adventurers turned grim.

However, this was the first time Ainz had heard that name. He fervently prayed to the gods he did not believe in that the others would not question him on this topic about which he knew nothing.

*Ignorance is frightening, I need to learn more.*

“That undead-controlling secret society? I guess they really are linked with that Vampire.”

“So their aim was to trigger incidents within and outside the city to split our forces? Or are both of them decoys, and is the real plan about to begin… this is terrible.”

“The most important thing is to make a reconnaissance. From what the rangers told us, there's a cave near the location where the Vampire was sighted. Apparently, that cave is a bandit's hideout…"

"It's quite likely that the Vampire has already departed that location… still, there's a non-zero chance of it remaining there, so we should send someone over—"

The adventurer who spoke immediately shut his mouth.

That was a natural reaction. After all, anyone heading to a likely location of that Vampire was essentially saying that they wanted to walk right into danger. If they really encountered the Vampire, and if the Vampire was as powerful as rumored, then certain death awaited them.

Those words were an indirect way of telling someone to kill themselves.

"...Let's leave that aside for now. It's more important to strengthen the city's defenses. After all, the Vampire might have infiltrated the city during this time, for all we know."

"...Well, it would be easy enough to infiltrate the city, as long as it could use magic. After all, this is not like the Imperial Capital, with air cavalry and magic casters on patrol."

One could use [Fly] to enter from the air, or walk right in with [Invisibility] for concealment. Magic was very troublesome to deal with, which was why consolidating their fighting strength and mounting a defense was the most logical course of action.

"Still, it's really hard to do anything without any concrete information. We really should investigate that cave!"

The opinions of everyone present gradually began shifting in favor of that extremely sensible proposal.

It would be very bad for Ainz if that came to pass.

Allowing Shalltear's appearance to become public knowledge would be a very bad thing. Although he did not know exactly how it would play out, allowing Shalltear's current appearance to disseminate through the city — perhaps even through the nation — would make covert actions very difficult in future.

Ainz desperately tried to think of a way to guide the situation in another direction.

In the end, there was only one way to avoid exposing Shalltear's identity.

Ainz gulped — though there was nothing for him to swallow — and said:

"To begin with, you are mistaken. That Vampire has nothing to do with Zuranon."

"Why is that, Momon-kun? Do you know something about this?"

"I know the name of that Vampire, because I have been hunting that creature for a long time."

"What?!"

The air shuddered.

Ainz's brain spun into overdrive — the main event was about to begin.

"It is an extremely powerful Vampire. In truth, the reason I became an adventurer was to collect information about them."

This was a red herring; but Ainzach took the bait.

"Them? Momon-kun, did you just say 'them'?"

"Yes, I did. There are two of these Vampires, and one of them, the silver-haired female, is known as…"

He suddenly stopped here. Originally, he was going to say "Carmilla", but a name like that was far too normal for a female Vampire. If there were any other players around, that name would swiftly clue them in about his presence. Just as he was waffling over what name to give them, a flash of inspiration struck, and he blurted a name:

"Honyopenyoto."

"Eh?"

That idiotic-sounding reply had not come from one mouth; just about everyone had exclaimed in the same way.

"...Her name is Honyopenyoko."

He had come up with the name himself, but he felt that it was slightly different from the one he had mentioned just before that. Still, if anyone pressed him with their doubts, he intended to maintain that he had misspoke.

"Honyo-penyo…?"

“It’s Honyopenyoko.”

While he had given a female Vampire a name ending with “ko”, no YGGDRASIL player should have been able to guess that he had made it up. Filled with pride at this perfect choice of names, Ainz smiled smugly under his helmet.

“Is, is that so? That Honyo… ah, forget it! Since we know that female Vampire’s name… It’s about time you told us your true identity, no? Which country are you—”

“I apologize, but I cannot say that right now. Currently, I am on a highly secret mission. If you find out, I will have no choice but to leave this land, and then you will have to deal with the Vampire yourself. I do not wish to have this become an international incident. You understand, don’t you, Mayor?”

The Mayor nodded slowly, and as Ainzach saw this he bit his lip and looked intently at Ainz.

The Guildmaster’s stare meant nothing to Ainz. However, he did not know if they had bought his story or if it contained any contradictions. Those two points of uncertainty filled Ainz’s heart with unease, but Ainz brushed it aside with an brusqueness that would brook no interference and continued:

“Our team will handle the reconnaissance. If we find the Vampire there, we will slay it on the spot.”

Thus spoke the latecoming Warrior of Darkness.

Though they could not see his face, they could feel the confidence and determination brimming in his voice.

The air filled with a pressure which might have been mistaken for rumbling, and the sigh which followed made everyone think they had made the sound.

“Then, ah, the other teams will—”

“—Will not be needed. I do not need them to slow me down.”

He waved off all opposition to that plan.

That tactless declaration was made with the utmost audacity.

That gesture was not a wise one, not among fellow adventurers of equivalent rank. However — all the adventurers here were grizzled veterans of countless life-and-death struggles. They could sense that his attitude was not born of recklessness, narcissism or pride, but had been coldly, carefully calculated. At the same time, it spoke volumes of Momon's own strength that he could make such a statement.

This was an extraordinary man.

It seemed as though his black armor was growing before their eyes, and the pressure they felt made them imagine that the room itself was shrinking. They could sense that this man was one they could not hope to surpass; as though he were an adamantite-ranked adventurer.

This man was a hero.

Ainzach choked his words back, and then took several deep breaths. In fact, everyone present was doing the same, and the Mayor even opened up his collar, his sweat flowing freely.

In a quiet voice, as though whispering into Momon's ear, Ainzach asked:

"—What about your payment?"

"I don't mind discussing that afterwards. However, after this incident is resolved… after the discovery and destruction of the Vampire, I would like an orichalcum rank at the very least. That would make it more convenient for me when I track that other Vampire, because it is tiresome to have to keep proving my strength."

Everyone present gasped in realization.

Adventurers did not work for cities or countries, but this city did not have any orichalcum-ranked adventurers at the moment. If he became one of the highest-ranked adventurers of this city, everybody would know his name. In addition, the rarity of orichalcum-ranked adventurers meant that their fame would spread even further. In this way, people would come to him with dangerous missions, and it would allow him to learn about powerful Vampires.

However, there was a man whose heart refused to accept this, even if he had already been persuaded on an intellectual level.

A chair screeched, and as all eyes went to the source of the sound — needless to say, it was Igvarge, who had been hectoring Ainz all this while.

"I can't bring myself to believe in your strength. Be-besides, it's still not clear if that Vampire is as strong as you say. Even animating that corpse could have been done through a magic item. We're going with you!"

The reason why Igvarge could still muster up his opposition to Ainz despite being shaken to the core was purely because of his hostility towards Ainz and his refusal to acknowledge him.

However, his fellow adventurers did not approve of his attitude. Perote spoke in a barbed tone:

"Igvarge, that tone of yours—"

"—It's fine."

Ainz readily agreed to the request. However, there was no kindness in that reply; the following words were cold and ruthless.

"That said, I must warn you that if you come along… it'll be certain death for you. Your entire party might be killed as well, for all I know."

That matter-of-fact tone did not sound like a threat, nor did it sound like a joke. It was a flat prediction of the future, which sent a shudder through Igvarge's body. In fact, everyone present was chilled to the bone by that statement.

Ainz shrugged.

"That's my warning to you. If you don't mind, then by all means, do come along."

"Of, of course!"

He was bluffing, but he could not back down here. He could not run away from this. How could he, an adventurer of equal rank, disgrace himself before someone in power like the Mayor?

Just as the tension built again between the two of them, Ainzach — who had calmed down a little — asked Ainz:

"It's all well and good to be confident, but is there any basis for that confidence? Of course, we know that you are strong, but surely you must know that the foe is no pushover either. Frankly speaking, we're not sure if we can leave everything to you either. If… if for some reason you're defeated, we need to think about what to do after that..."

Without skipping a beat, Ainz replied:

“I have a trump card.”

“What is that?”

Ainz produced a crystal and showed it to the intrigued Ainzach.

“...It can’t be! It’s impossible, unbelievable…” Rakesheer shouted, before panting:

“I once read an old tome… they say that the Theocracy possesses powerful magic items which they consider their national treasures. This is one of them… a spell-sealing crystal. How did you come to possess such a thing?!”

“How surprising… but you have it right. In addition, this crystal now contains a spell of the 8th tier.”

“What?! What did you just say?!”

The exclamations that Ainz had evoked from Rakesheer were like the cries of a strangled chicken. Even the man’s face had distorted to quite a frightening extent.

Nor was it just Rakesheer who was shocked. Everyone — no, everybody except the Mayor had an expression of fear or surprise on their stunned faces. Any adventurer with even a meager bit of experience could understand the value of the item which Ainz had shown to them.

“...The 8th tier… you’re lying, right?”

“...It might be a fairytale, but if it’s really magic of that level… it would be nothing short of mythical.”

“Are you kidding me?! What kind of nonsense is that?!”

The three adventurers — even Igvarge — stared intently at the crystal within the black gauntlet, with frightened looks on their faces.

“Forgive me! Could, could I borrow that item for a bit?”

“Why?”

“That… it’s just a magic caster’s curiosity. I vow I will not do anything strange to it! If you wish anything as collateral, I can pledge everything on my person, for instance, this belt—”

Rakesheer was already unbuckling his belt before he finished. Ainz replied in an annoyed tone:

“I understand, there’s no need for that sort of thing. Here, have a look.”

“Ah, sorry about this, but may I touch it too?”

“Me too!”

The spell-sealing crystal passed through several hands before reaching Rakesheer, who stared dumbly at it, like a woman who had finally obtained a jewel she had long thirsted for. No, one could say that he was like a boy who had found a treasure he had always sought.

“Amazing… ah, yes, Momon-dono, may I cast a spell on it?”

After seeing Ainz agree with a wave of his hand, Rakesheer eagerly worked his magic.

“[Appraisal Magic Item], [Detect Enchant].”

The look on the man’s face grew even more exaggerated after he cast those spells, and then—

“Awesome!”

—There was no trace of the man from earlier. Instead, his innocent eyes radiated a look of pure delight, and even his tone was different, like he was a teenager again.

“It’s true! It’s really 8th-tier magic! That’s all my spells can tell me… but it’s awesome, really awesome!”

He shouted like this over and over again, which left everyone else staring in stunned silence. Then, Rakesheer picked up the crystal and licked it all over, even mashing it into his face — like he had gone mad.

“Get, get a grip! What the hell are you doing!”

Ainzach rose to his feet and drew close to Rakesheer, disturbed by his friend’s sudden bout of insanity. Indeed, everyone was looking at him with an expression of shock or disgust. Such behavior was unsightly, coming from a man so highly-placed in the city.

“You idiot! How could anyone get a grip? This is seriously awesome! It’s got an 8th-tier spell inside it, though I don’t know what spell it is!”

Rakesheer continued staring at the crystal in excitement, his eyes sparkling. Before long, he had slowly recovered his sanity, and he asked Ainz:

“Momon-dono! Where, where did you find this crystal?! Tell me!!”

"It was dug up in a certain ruin, along with many magic items. Of course, the crystal already had the spell sealed inside it by the time it was discovered. I had a powerful magic caster identify it."

"I see! Then, then where is the site of this ruin?!"

"All I can tell you is that it is very far away…"

Rakesheer bit his lip as he heard Ainz's matter-of-fact reply.

"Then, could I have it back?"

"Uuu… okie."

Rakesheer looked around, then reluctantly returned the crystal to Ainz. As he watched Ainz wipe the crystal clean with a piece of parchment, he suddenly exclaimed:

"Back to the point, I — I oppose Ainz-san going forth to slay the Vampire!"

A shocked silence settled over the room once more and Ainzach palmed his face. He grimaced, and then asked in a severe tone:

"...Why the sudden opposition? Well, I already know why, but still — I have to ask."

"Oh, that… it's because it would be too much of a waste."

*He's gone completely insane,* Ainzach decided as he looked on his friend and decided to discard his opinion.

"Well then, leaving Rakesheer's words aside…"

"Please wait! Magic of the 8th tier is practically of a divine level! How can you use such a valuable item on a mere Vampire?"

Anger boiled in Ainzach's eyes. He could no longer tolerate these outbursts, especially not from someone as highly placed as Rakesheer.

Then, Ainzach choked back his wrath, and calmly told the other man:

"...Forgive me, Rakesheer, but please don't continue making a scene."

The powerful subtext in those words returned Rakesheer to his senses and left him speechless. The slight blush in his cheeks was probably due to embarrassment at his earlier actions.

After glancing at his friend to make sure he was back to normal, Ainzach decided to formalize the request.

"...Then, Momon-kun, we'll be leaving everything to you."

Ainz nodded confidently in response to Ainzach's humble submission.

"I understand."

Then, he looked at Igvarge through the slit of his helmet.

"We'll be moving out as soon as possible. Vampires suffer a penalty of slowed movement under daylight."

"Penalty? Eh, a weakness, then? They do move slowly in the day. Our side will be ready soon."

"...Not going to discuss it with your comrades?"

"It's fine, they'll understand."

"...Is that so. Then, we'll meet at E-Rantel's main gate in an hour."

"One hour? Isn't that a bit too soon? There's still a long time before sunset."

"I am in a big hurry. If your courage is lacking and you need some time to psyche yourselves up7, then I'll leave you here and go on my own. Any questions?"

"I get it. We'll prepare ourselves right away."

There was clear anger in Igvarge's voice as he rose after speaking. Ainz coldly glared at Igvarge's retreating back, and then turned to look at the other people who were in the room.

"Then, we shall set out immediately. I hope everyone else will defend E-Rantel. I do not wish to return after not having encountered the Vampire to find that a troublesome situation has developed."

"Well, I can't say there won't be any problems, but you can leave it to us. If you meet any danger, I pray you will fall back immediately."

Ainz nodded and then left.

♦♦♦

In the end, there were only three people left in the room; Panasolei, Ainzach and Rakesheer, who still had a lovestruck expression on his face.

"I apologize for showing you that embarrassing side of myself."

"It's fine, don't worry."

Panasolei smiled sheepishly at Rakesheer's apology. However, their opinion of him had changed greatly.

Rakesheer also felt that it had been quite an unsightly display on his part, but even so, he found it difficult to conceal his excitement.

He had met Lizzie the herbalist some time ago, and she had eagerlyshared the matter of the potion with him. As he listened to her excited exposition back then, he had regarded her with cool eyes and wondered if it was truly worth shouting about. Now, however, he wanted to laugh at his past self.

He now understood the uncontrollable surprise and emotional upheaval one felt when an unattainable object appeared before one's eyes.

"Was that truly such a valuable item?"

Rakesheer fell silent. This was because he was struggling to suppress the boyish glee which was welling up within him.

"Yes. That item could change everything we know about magic. The fact is, magic above the 6th tier only resides in the legends. That was the first time I personally saw something like that."

The spells known as tiered magic had appeared in this world about 500 to 600 years ago. After that, there had been several heroic magic-users, but the rumors of people other than the Thirteen Heroes using spells of the 7th-tier and up were exactly that — rumors.

In the heroic sagas, there was a hero who once used a spell which made people conclude that "it's impossible even with magic of the 7th tier or higher", but most people thought that it was just a story. In addition, the question of whether the Thirteen Heroes actually used magic of the 7th tier and up was also in doubt.

However—

Rakesheer thought, *these stories might not be entirely fictional.* He made a mental note of this and told himself to investigate them when he had time.

For instance, the Goblin King who slew many dragons with an ash branch, the winged hero who soared through the sky for long periods, the mystic knight who rode a Trihead Dragon, the princess who ruled her crystal city with her twelve loyal knights, and so on.

"Then, can we trust him?"

Naturally, Panasolei was referring to Ainz.

*"I received a potion from an adventurer in stylish black full plate and threw it at the Vampire, causing it to fall back"* — that was the testimony of the sole surviving adventurer.

Thus, they had consulted the city's most renowned herbalist, Lizzie Bareare about the matter. What they had learned was that the potion was a magic item just as valuable as the spell-sealing crystal from just now.

While one might only be suspicious if he possessed just one exotic item, it was only natural to wonder who he was if he possessed two of them. Still, why had the Vampire halted its attack?

There were two possibilities. One was that they were in opposition. The other was that there was some link between them. This was why they wanted to see if such a relationship existed. Was Momon really a foe of this Vampire?

"Do you think he's in cahoots with the Vampire?"

This was what they were truly worried about, and the three of them thought back to their conversation with Momon.

"I think the possibility of that is very low. What do you think, Rakesheer?"

"I agree. There are better ways to pretend to kill the Vampire and then conceal her."

Even if Momon really were linked to the Vampire, the response outlined earlier would do him no good at all.

"Could it be he just wants to become an orichalcum-ranked adventurer?"

"I doubt it, Mayor. Adventurers enjoy fame and prestige, but command little power. What are the benefits of becoming an orichalcum-ranked adventurer, Ainzach?"

"...Well, you can accept better-paying requests, and you'll be more famous. If you're lucky, you might even be offered a government post with good terms… although, that's about it. Power can be much more easily gained through other means."

The most telling impression of adventurers was that they were specialized anti-monster mercenaries. Certainly, it was possible that one might become the leader of the local chapter of the Adventurer's Guild, but they would still be unable to reach a position where they could dictate national policy.

"If wealth was his aim, he could sell that crystal and never have to worry about money for the rest of his life. Someone as strong as him could rise in fame quickly enough. The fact is, quite a few of the city guard are already calling him a legendary hero."

Panasolei nodded in agreement.

He had taken out a towering undead creature in one hit, and then mowed through countless undead like a storm, leaving shattered bodies in his wake. These awe-inspiring sights were truly those which would be associated with a great hero.

The guards eagerly spread their accounts of Momon's prowess, patting their chests and declaring that there would be no need to fear monsters with him around.

"That said, I regret to say that we have no evidence to prove his reliability. Still, there are no contradictions in what Momon-dono has said so far, and if he really was an enemy, why would he show us that spell-sealing crystal? I think we can trust him."

Rakesheer's words put a grimace on the face of the other two men. That expression clearly said that it was hard to believe such words coming from a maniac like him.

"Mayor, Ainzach, the reason why neither of you can bring yourselves to trust Momon-san is because he showed up just as the Vampire did, am I correct? However, I feel that Momon-san's words can adequately explain that."

The two men nodded in agreement.

"In addition, if that female Vampire really was being hunted by Momon-san, there's also a rational explanation for why she ceased her attack on the lady adventurer when it saw Momon-san's rare potion. In addition, it's possible that the female adventurer was spared because the Vampire wanted to let Momon-san know she was here."

"I see… so she wanted to let Momon-san think she was nearby and make him stay here. The female Vampire must have seen the female adventurer's potion and suspected that she was related to Momon-san. Thus, she let her go, to spread the news of her presence. It does make sense…"

"...Given the fact that Momon-kun chased that Vampire all the way here… I can't imagine she would be happy about learning that he was around."

"Indeed, Mayor. However, while we do not yet know which country he hails from, we should still treat him well and be on our guard. Although I don't think he's that suspicious… kuku, I'd like to discuss the matter of Momon-san's magic items with him. His suit of armor looks quite valuable as well."

"...Speaking of Momon-kun, there's something I wanted to ask you, Mayor — where are the corpses of Zuranon?"

"I have no idea."

The Mayor scowled as he said this.

The mangled corpses left behind by Ainz had been placed in storage under the eyes of layers upon layers of guards, but they had vanished after daybreak. Although they suspected that someone had broken in and stolen them, the guards had not been attacked and there were no signs of anyone suspicious.

The storage area had been built in a way that inhibited the use of teleportation magic; one could say that it was something of a secret room. Thus, there was no sign of how the intruders had even managed to enter. It was as though the corpses had vanished in a puff of smoke.

They were still secretly searching for clues within the city, but nothing had turned up. The possibility of finding anything relevant were close to zero. In other words, there was nothing they could learn from the two corpses.

"Could it be that the unholy ritual they were conducting turned them into undead, which then escaped?"

"...We cannot rule that possibility out entirely."

"How troubling, we couldn't even get any evidence from it… the only possibility is that secret shrine under that chapel, no? It would be good if we could learn something useful from it."

"From what you said, it would seem that Momon-kun did not enter that place. If we found an ownerless magic item of great value in there, could we hand to to him?"

"Mmm, if it those items have nothing to do with the ritual, then by adventurers' rules, they would belong to him."

## Part 4

Ainz sped through the streets.

The warm wind filtered in through the slits in his helmet, blowing over the location which corresponded to his eyes. Perhaps if he had eyeballs, he would be blinking non-stop, but Ainz lacked any sensory organs, so all he felt was "the wind is blowing".

Looking down, he saw the earth flying past him beneath his feet, like a loosed arrow. He did not know if it was because he was close to the ground or because of some other reason, but it felt like he was moving faster than he actually was. Of course, he was not frightened in the least. Still, every time his body bounced up, he reflexively channelled more strength into his legs.

Although Hamsuke could maintain its balance well, it was still a Djungarian Hamster, albeit a gigantic one. Ainz needed to spread his legs wide to ride it, and this unstable riding posture was compounded by a lack of reins, barding or a saddle. Even someone with extraordinary balance like Ainz had to be careful not to fall off.

*It'll be hard to swing my swords while riding Hamsuke; perhaps I should have a set of riding tack and barding made for it soon. The head blacksmith's making a decoy suit of armor; perhaps I could get some help there.*

It was not just the unsteady ride which brought that topic to mind, but also because of the shape which rode beside him.

Narberal was mounted on a horse while staying in line with Ainz.

She rode a Statue of Animal - War Horse, a magic item which summoned a massive destrier in heavy plate barding.

She was a dazzling sight, skilfully guiding her gigantic horse as it galloped down the city streets. Her ponytail swayed in the wind, and her brown cape fluttered out behind her. The way she sat tall in the saddle was as though she had come straight off a movie screen.

In contrast, Ainz rode a giant Djungarian Hamster. How could he even compete? He looked forward, despair filling his heart, and saw a group of men there.

They were a team of four people, and they seemed better equipped than the members of Swords of Darkness, with whom Ainz had travelled with earlier.

Ainz tucked the matter of the Swords of Darkness into the corner of his mind, letting go of his complicated thoughts concerning that issue, and then studied the horses those people rode.

They were majestic beasts.

Ainz was no equestrian, but given that their coats gleamed and their bodies were in fine fettle, they should have been superior horses.

The four mounted men rode in a formation shaped like an isosceles triangle, and they too looked like they had sprung from a movie.

*I must look like an idiot riding Hamsuke. I certainly feel stupid enough.*

Ainz was quite depressed, but he seemed to be the only one who felt that way.

“That’s an impressive-looking creature you’re riding there.”

Those words came from one of Igvarge’s comrades as he tried to strike up conversation with Ainz. Unlike Igvarge, there was no hostility in his voice. Instead, it would seem Hamsuke had piqued his adventurer’s curiosity, and his words were filled with wonder and awe.

“What manner of beast is that? Is it famous?”

“...It is the Wise King of the Forest.”

“Ehhhh?! What! That legendary monster?!”

The staring man’s eyes went wide as he exclaimed in surprise.

*I still can’t get used to that sort of reaction. Do they have to make such a big deal over a hamster… hm?*

Out of the corner of his eye, Ainz could see Hamsuke woffling its whiskers in pride, and its ears twitched in time with the movement. It was probably paying attention to Ainz's conversation, given the way it was shuddering under him.

Ainz mercilessly chopped Hamsuke on the head with his gauntleted hand, which produced a deep, reverberating sound from the creature's skull.

"No, I just heard Igvarge talk about it… I see, he's seeing red again."

"How did he describe me? Ah, forget it, you don't have to tell me. I can guess from the looks on your faces."

"Hahaha, my apologies. That guy… he's not really a bad sort, but he gets blinded by what's in front of him sometimes."

"...It's a wonder how you guys have stayed safe with a companion like that. Or has this party changed out a lot of members?"

"No, everybody's been with the team ever since it was formed. That guy's a pretty good adventurer, unlike what his personality would suggest."

"Pretty good… huh."

Ainz turned to Igvarge, and received a hostile glare in response.

"You guys must have had a really hard time," Ainz snorted. Then, after dropping that line, he raised his hand, indicating that Narberal should suppress the anger building within her towards Igvarge. Ainz did not want to start a fight here — there were more important things which had to be done at this moment.

After signalling to Narberal, Hamsuke raised its head.

"Milord… your servant's head hurts…"

Tears sparkled in those black, beady eyes.

Ainz felt a twinge of regret. Perhaps he had used too much force. Still, it would have been bad if he had been tossed off at those speeds.

He would not be hurt even if he hit the ground. Ainz had once conducted an experiment with one of the vassals who had similar damage reduction to his own, and it had not felt any pain even after being dropped from a height of 1 kilometer.

The problem was what would happen if his travelling companions began having their doubts about Ainz's toughness. Now that they had come this far together, Ainz was sincere about getting along with them until the very end.

“Run more evenly. I don’t want to use force to cling to you.”

“Understood! Milord must be worried about his servant’s body!”

This time, Hamsuke teared up because it was moved, and Ainz ordered it to watch its front. It was then that Igvarge’s companion from earlier addressed him in a respectful tone:

“Oh, that’s amazing, to think you can maintain your balance in such a precarious position. This would be pretty dangerous, even for someone with a good sense of balance like yours, no?”

“It’s because I’m used to it… though I do intend to have it fitted for a saddle soon.”

“A harness, huh… I don’t really like that… just a jape, of course! If Milord desires it, then your servant has no objections!”

Under Narberal’s reproachful gaze, Hamsuke scrambled to display the attitude befitting of a loyal vassal. The vibrations coming from beneath Ainz’s waist were different from the tremors of travel.

Ainz furrowed his illusionary eyebrows beneath his helm.

*There’s no need to frighten a hamster with killing intent, is there? While I do appreciate that sort of loyalty, isn’t that going a bit too far? It’s fine to look down on human beings, but there’s a time and place for that sort of thing… She doesn’t quite seem to grasp that concept… Was she really designed that way? There’s not much which can be done if she’s like that, but…*

Just having Hamsuke with him was a huge boost to his fame, and the combination of the Wise King of the Forest’s staunch loyalty to himself was far different from the fear it inspired in others. The first would make people think highly of Ainz and consider him to be a noble adventurer. Although it did not mean much to him, he wanted to continue developing in that direction since he had the chance to do so. This was also because he wanted to be regarded as a hero. In addition, it would be helpful to have people outside of Nazarick swear loyalty to him.

That made Ainz reflect on his actions, and he considered that he might have been too rough towards Hamsuke. Therefore, he lightly patted the place which he had chopped just now, as though stroking a small animal.

"Milord… this is embarrassing…"

The sound of grinding teeth was clearly audible to Ainz, through the galloping of horses.

*...You're part of the reason I'm doing this, no? Speaking of which, how hard are you grinding your teeth anyway? If she's really jealous, then I should do something for her, right? Narberal's been very loyal too, but… what kind of reward can I give her?*

As Ainz agonized about whether to give her a ring or some other treasure, Igvarge spoke in a thoroughly unfriendly manner.

"Oi, Momon, we're here."

After indicating that it understood, Hamsuke gradually reduced its speed. Unlike a horse, Ainz could communicate directly to Hamsuke. Ainz had no equestrian experience and was not at all confident about stopping a horse.

*It's a little embarrassing to ride Hamsuke, but I should be glad because I don't have to ride a horse. Still, the time might come when I might have to do so, I should probably practice that a little in case of emergencies.*

Ainz leapt off Hamsuke, then petted it in gratitude. Narberal transformed her horse back into a statuette and the men tied up their horses.

"Then, let's go. What formation should we take when moving?"

"We'll take the lead, you can follow behind."

"I don't care what you do, just keep us in mind and be careful."

After hearing Igvarge's annoyed response, Ainz led Narberal and Hamsuke into the forest.

Much like the forest near Carne Village, the woodlands here bore no signs of human habitation and were very difficult to traverse. However, Ainz was festooned in magic items and thus it seemed like a flat plain to him. In addition, his anxiety over Shalltear made him quicken his pace, to the point where Igvarge had to ask them to slow down.

Well, he did ask them, but his crude words were full of hostility. Narberal — who was walking beside Ainz — very nearly turned around to rebuke him, but Ainz forced her to keep quiet.

“We’re almost there, act like an adult.”

Ainz smiled under his helmet as he saw the frustrated look on Narberal’s face. By now, Hamsuke had sensed something amiss, and its ears twitched continuously, as though it had heard something.

Ainz knew what had prompted that response from Hamsuke, and so he whispered into Hamsuke’s ear:

“—Stop that.”

“What? Milord, what are you—”

“—The sound of metal you might have heard is from my subordinates. Pay it no heed.”

“Yes, yes, it is. My apologies, milord.”

“By the way, have you picked up on anyone following us aside from that?”

He had ordered Nigredo to establish surveillance and had taken many other precautions besides, but he asked again just to be sure.

“No, other than that, almost nobody is following us.”

“Oi~ what’s happening up there?” asked the man who had been riding beside Ainz. SInce the team’s representative Igvarge was not asking that question, his presence here needed no explanation.

Ainz waved a hand, indicating that nothing was wrong.

“Really?”

The man did not seem happy with that answer, but after sensing that Ainz did not want to talk about it, he shrugged and did not press the matter.

*Well, it’s not like I hate you or anything.*

Ainz merely thought those words without speaking them as he silently advanced through the forest.

After they had travelled some distance, the sound of weapons being drawn one after the other came from the rear. Ainz halted and leisurely looked back.

“Is something the matter?”

“Is something the matter?! You’re on point, you should be more alert!”

This was the first time the other men showed their approval for Igvarge's hostility.

"Oi! You, hiding over there, come out slowly!"

Igvarge was shouting at a tree which was large enough to hide a person's silhouette.

Amidst the growing tension in the air, Ainz calmly walked over to that tree. A somewhat panicked voice called out to him, but Ainz paid it no heed.

Narberal watched like it was the natural thing to do. Hamsuke had his doubts, but he did not offer any opposition.

As he drew close to the tree, someone stepped out from behind it, as though in response. The person in question was dressed in a suit of full plate armor which was the same black as Ainz's own. That person held a gigantic axe (a bardiche) which radiated a sickly green glow.

The commanding presence of this warrior filled the scene with a strange air. Or rather, only parts of it were filled with strangeness.

Ainz gently raised a hand and said:

"Thank you for coming all this way."

"Thank you, Ainz-sama."

The warrior — Albedo — bowed respectfully to her lord and master.

"Then, Shallte—"

"—Who is she? Is she a friend of yours? And what's this about Ainz-sama?"

These loud questions bombarded Ainz from behind, one after the other.

This was an entirely understandable reaction for Igvarge and his crew, but it was an unpardonable offense to Albedo, who was still bowing to Ainz. Fiery rancor blazed within her heart, and then she let it out, as though she planned to incinerate everything in the area with the flames of her wrath.

Hamsuke shuddered, every hair on its body standing on end, more than ever before.

Given that even a bystander had this sort of reaction, how much worse must it have been for the targets of Albedo's fury? Their faces had turned white and oily sweat cascaded down their foreheads as they realised that their insignificant lives would be snuffed out shortly.

“Allow me to introduce you to everyone. This is my companion — Albedo.”

“Ainz-sama, I find it hard to believe that you would consider me a companion… after all, I am but your loyal servant.”

“That is true, so I take those words back. She is my subordinate; does that answer your question? Then, Albedo, commence the next step, as we planned.”

The men were still staring in stunned silence as Albedo walked towards them.

“Oh, I almost forgot. My name is not Momon. My real name is Ainz. Not that you need to remember that, of course.”

Albedo smiled smugly as she beheld the confused looks on the men’s faces. However, that smile was as icy as the grave.

“Then, Albedo… deal with them. Take one alive… no, another one might be good as a spare. The jamming is already in place, so you can go ahead and use magical communication.”

Just as the shock from hearing Ainz’s calm and dispassionate orders began filtering into the minds of Igvarge and his people, Ainz continued his instructions:

“Take their corpses back to Nazarick. If they’re strong enough, we can use them for experiments in making high-tier undead.”

“Understood.”

Albedo slowly raised her weapon, the gigantic axe.

There was no murderous intent or hostility in that action.

That was only to be expected. After all, to Albedo, chopping off the heads of inferior lifeforms (humans) was little more than cutting the leaves off a daikon.

If this were not Ainz’s order, she might not even need to swing her weapon to verify her calmness.

Igvarge and his party might not have understood the situation, but they still knew they were in danger, and they raised their swords in preparation to fight.

Bathed in looks of shock, Ainz merely shrugged.

“Ah, sorry about that. I misspoke back in the guild; when I said ‘Following me is certain death’, I actually meant ‘If you follow me, I will kill all of you’.”

Thus did Ainz pronounce their death sentence.

“I warned you, but you would not listen. These are the consequences of your choice. Accept them with dignity.”

Igvarge and his group chose to retreat.

The reason why they had all immediately fallen back without so much as verifying the plan with hand signals was because they understood the vast difference between their respective battle strengths. In addition, they did not retreat as one, but they split up to flee, in order to maximize their chances of survival.

Their reaction was outside the scope of Albedo’s predictions, and she was a moment too late to respond. Although her physical attributes far exceeded those of Ainz, chasing an enemy through the forest was still quite troublesome.

She chased down her first target in an instant, and rendered him unconscious with a capturing-type skill.

Albedo’s keen hearing picked up on the sounds of metal mixed with the wails of the fleeing men. However, she could not get an accurate fix on their position due to the trees blocking her line of sight. In addition, people without metal armor would only make noise when they stepped on grass or twigs, which only made it harder for Albedo to pinpoint their location, given that she lacked levels in ranger and rogue-type classes.

Albedo shook her head and sighed. Then she issued a command:

“Mare, deal with those two. Ah, right, eliminate the man who was disrespectful to Ainz-sama.”

## Part 5

Igvarge ran.

Back in the Guild, he had understood to some extent that Momon was a better adventurer than himself, but Igvarge was unwilling to acknowledge that fact.

However, when he personally witnessed the commanding figure of Momon's majestic riding beast — the ancient, legendary monster known as the Wise King of The Forest — he had no choice but to accept it. Anyone who could tame such a creature by strength alone was clearly far beyond mithril-rank.

As he realised that what they had discussed in that room was true, Igvarge's heart filled with anger.

*I don't know what country you're from, but don't get in my way. I can give you information if you want, but in exchange, go stand aside and wait.*

To Igvarge, it was as though someone had trespassed in his territory.

He and his group had trained hard to fulfil their dreams, had slowly climbed the ranks after countless close brushes with death. It was only natural that they would be unhappy when somebody cut in all of a sudden and jumped several ranks.

He would pull Momon down if he had the chance. He would ruin Momon's reputation with false rumors. That was what Igvarge had in mind when he had chosen to set out with Momon.

This was also why — when Momon's black-clad companion showed up and declared she was going to kill Igvarge and his group — he could fall back with no hesitation at all. Though he was afraid, he still moved faster than anyone else. He was driven by the malicious desire to spread bad news about Momon — about Ainz to the Guild.

*Serves you right, I'll make it back alive for sure and then I'll disclose everything about you to the world!*

He did not know how Momon was connected to the Vampire. However, he was sure he could steer the rumors in that direction

Though he knew that terrible weapon might scythe down on him at any time, though he knew his life might be in danger, Igvarge laughed, unable to suppress the emotions surging up in his heart.

He did not care about his comrades at all. No, if they became decoys that let him live on, so much the better.

*I will reach the top. I will attain the orichalcum, then the adamantite rank, and become a renowned hero.*

There was no need for anybody strong beside himself. His companions were all stepping stones on his climb to the summit. He would be the true hero who saved the world, like the Thirteen Heroes of the past. This was the dream Igvarge had had ever since he heard the saga of the Thirteen Heroes in his youth from a bard in his village.

But then, there was a man who was going to stand in the way of his dreams — was going to surpass him and his team. Worse, he was doing it as a part-time job. That was unforgivable.

He ran and he ran and he ran.

The fact that Igvarge could run at top speed through the forest without his face turning red or panting was proof that he was indeed a mithril-ranked adventurer.

However—

Ripples coursed through Igvarge’s heart; big ones.

*Where is this place? I circled around because I was afraid they would have set up an ambush near the horses… eh?*

Igvarge felt that this was right, and his sense of direction told him that much. However, his sixth sense said otherwise. He would not get lost even if this was his first time in any particular forest. However, for some reason, he was still uncertain of his location.

*I must be imagining things,* he thought. However, this did not feel like his imagination at all. However reluctantly, he had to acknowledge that this was real.

“...Am I lost? But… how could a forest stalker like myself get lost?”

Igvarge’s vocation was one which specialized in outdoor movement. In a sense, the woods were like his back yard. However, a strange, unsettling feeling filled him. This forest now seemed like the gaping maw of some vast carnivorous beast.

“It’s just like a maze…”

Unease and anxiety welled up inside, as a change came over the forest which should have been completely familiar to him.

And then—

—-He heard the sound of quiet rustling.

Igvarge recalled the black-clad executioner from just now, and jerked his head back to look at the source of the sound. He saw a child’s head poking out from behind a tree.

That child was a Dark Elf, closely related to the Elves, who were humanoids which lived in the depths of the forest.

*Why is there a Dark Elf here?*

He had heard that the large settlements of the Dark Elves were located in the great forests to the south, where no man had set foot. Dark Elves were the sort who lived far away from civilized areas. In that respect, they were different from the Forest Elves, who traded with humanity.

There was something strange about this Dark Elf, who was also a child. It filled Igvarge's heart with doubt. Just then, the child nervously stepped forward.

*It's a girl.*

She was dressed in female attire, and the frightened look on her delicate, beautiful face aroused Igvarge's sadistic desires. Although he wondered if this girl had been sent by Momon, the two of them had completely different attitudes, and so he laughed the idea off as impossible.

More importantly, if this girl was a Dark Elf that lived in this forest, she would surely know a safe route out of it. In addition, if that black-armored woman caught up to him, he could use the girl as a hostage. With that in mind, Igvarge decided to try and get the girl to obey him, and so he took a step forward.

"...Oi."

He intentionally pitched his voice low, filling it with notes of menace, and startled the Dark Elf girl into taking a step back.

"Ah, I, I'm sorry…"

Igvarge chuckled coldly as he saw the nervous look on her face. He was confident that his plan would work.

“No need to be sorry. There’s something I want to ask you, so come over here.”

“Uh… uhh… about that… I, I’m sorry.”

A question mark seemed to appear over Igvarge’s head as he wondered why she was apologizing again. However, the ebony staff in the Dark Elf girl’s hand had already swung towards him.

The vegetation turned to snares, which securely bound Igvarge’s entire body.

He trembled in shock.

How could a mithril-ranked adventurer like himself fail to stop the magic of a brat like her?

Even after struggling with all his might, the plants refused to budge. As anxiety and panic filled his heart, Igvarge raised his voice and shouted:

“You - you little bitch! If you don’t let me go, I’ll kill you! Oi!”

The Dark Elf nervously lowered her head and advanced toward Igvarge.

It was then that Igvarge realised her outfit was quite exceptional. Both her clothes and armor were masterfully made, of the sort which Igvarge himself would not be able to acquire. In addition, her eyes — the memory of something an Elf friend of his had once said surfaced hazily in his mind.

However, before the memory could fully take shape, a shadow fell across his face.

The girl forcefully swung her staff.

Though her face still looked afraid, there was no emotion in her eyes. She did not feel anything about what she was about to do to Igvarge. It was as though her fearful attitude was just an act she had been directed to put on.

He superimposed the form of the girl before him over that of the black-armored woman from just now.

“Wait, wait a minute! What are you trying to—”

♦♦♦

Albedo arrived just as Mare’s staff fell on the man’s head. His helmet deformed under the impact of the staff and the skull below caved in, while his eyeballs popped free of his head from the force of the tremendous impact. His head was thoroughly smashed, like a watermelon during a suikawari game at the beach in summer.

“Thanks for your hard work.”

“Ah, about that, Albedo-sama, it, it’s over… is, is this fine?”

Albedo removed her helmet, and smiled to Mare as he looked up nervously to her.

“It was perfect. Granted, it was a somewhat messy way of killing him, but it’s fine. Ainz-sama will surely praise you for this.”

“Re-really? Ehehehe.”

The delighted Dark Elf looked to the corpse, and then Albedo asked:

“How about the other one?”

“Ah, w-well… he’s been taken care of. I, I dragged the corpse behind a tree...”

“Is that so? Beautifully done. Then, Mare, can you help me bring the corpses back to Nazarick?”

“I... I got it.”

Albedo smiled once more to the smiling boy who was giggling as he held his bloodstained staff. He was such an honest boy.

Still, he would do well to be more open.

## Part 6

“It is finished, Ainz-sama,” Albedo said, her helmet held at her waist. Ainz nodded as he heard this. Now, there were no witnesses to Shalltear’s identity. With his armor gone, Ainz felt quite at ease as he replied:

“Good work. How about the recovery of the bodies?”

“I have already asked Mare to send them back to Nazarick.”

“I see. Well then, that problem’s taken care of. Sadly, they were killed by the Vampire, so we, the survivors, must continue pressing on.”

“Understood. Then… Ainz-sama, what is that trembling creature which cowers under your cloak?”

Ainz turned, and found that as expected — although it was quite hard to understand why such a large creature would do such a thing — Hamsuke was clinging to his cloak. Its large, beady eyes were moist, and its fur stood in terror. Of course, it was Albedo which it feared.

“Think of it as my pet. I have named it Hamsuke.”

“What! That *thing* actually has the position coveted by all the denizens of Nazarick?!”

“...Hm? ...Ah, Hamsuke. This is Albedo, my faithful servant who rules my domain of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. In other words, she is your boss. Go, introduce yourself to her.”

“This lowly one is, as milord has already said, known as Hamsuke. I place myself in your care, Albedo-dono.”

“...Pleased to meet you, Hamsuke.”

“All right, introductions are over. From now on, I will be going onward with Albedo. Narberal, return to Nazarick with Hamsuke and

Mare… and pay attention to the object I put in your mouth."

"Yes!"

Narberal's reply was quite energetic. Hamsuke swirled the object it had received in the graveyard within its mouth, and it asked Narberal in a garbled way:

"Un-understood, milord. And — this thing is really noisy! I have an important question to ask! Quiet down in there! Then, this one has a question to ask… Narberal-dono, will this one be in danger? Will this one be eaten up?"

"Since you are now Ainz-sama's pet, you will not be eaten without authorization. I will inform everybody; there is no need to worry."

Ainz's face did not move, but he was smiling. It would seem that letting them travel together in E-Rantel had improved their relationship.

"All right, then let's go, Albedo."

"Understood."

As Narberal and Hamsuke watched, Ainz and Albedo headed toward Shalltear's location.

"Ah, yes, Ainz-sama. The corpses of those men reminded me of the words you spoke to me in the Throne Room. Shall we recover the corpses of the man and woman which you eliminated last night, Ainz-sama?"

"Well, about that…"

Just as he was about to repeat what he had told Narberal last night about, “we need to pin the blame on them as the masterminds of this incident”, Albedo continued speaking and interrupted him.

“They might have learned something while fighting you, Ainz-sama. Since there is magic which can bring the dead back to life, the best course of action would have been to immediately recover the corpses. Or was there some special reason for doing otherwise?”

Ainz’s breathing stopped — no, he had not needed to breathe in the first place.

Albedo had hit the nail on the head.

*...Crap.*

Resurrection magic existed in this world; in other words, dead men *could* tell tales, better than what any autopsy would say.

Ainz recalled the events of that night. He thought about his real identity, the name of Nazarick, and Narberal’s abilities. That man and woman knew it all, especially that woman.

This was too fatal of a mistake to be written off with the word “mistake”.

All he could do was hope that nobody could use resurrection magic, but according to the information gained from the Sunlight Scripture, there were people within the Slaine Theocracy who could use such magic. In addition, there was a high chance that top-ranked (adamantite) adventurers possessed spells like that, and high-ranking officials in a country might secretly command people who were capable of such magic.

If that were the case, the higher-ups in E-Rantel would look for people to use magic on them once they concluded that the deceased possessed such important information. Given that what they had done would have shaken E-Rantel, it would be natural for said higher-ups to want to know more.

Ainz felt his nonexistent heart beating at a breakneck pace.

*What should I do now?*

It went without saying that he had to recover the bodies as quickly as possible. However, who should he send?

Ainz had told Narberal not to bother with the corpses. Should he publicly tell her that was a mistake?

*...No, I shouldn’t say anything.*

He should avoid saying anything that might lower their faith to him further as long as he did not know why Shalltear had betrayed him. He had to remain calm in a situation like this.

Ainz now knew why the superiors in his company were unwilling to admit their mistakes. With a prayer in his heart, he made a decision.

“...Indeed, that is correct. However, I do have a special reason for leaving those bodies be. Calm yourself; everything dances within the palm of my hand… the matter of Shalltear aside.”

“I see! As expected of you, Ainz-sama. I see you have already anticipated the developments I had in mind. It seems I have spoken too much, and I apologize for that. Come to think of it, why did you not use resurrection magic at all, Ainz-sama? It would allow you to question dead humans and the like while gathering information.”

“...Eh?”

A very off-key squeak of surprise escaped Ainz.

“Did I not mention it? Then, have you heard of Demiurge’s healing experiments?”

“Yes, I have. Sever all four limbs. heal them with magic, those experiments, right?”

“Indeed. Then, another question for you. Do you know where a resurrection spell has to be applied?’

“Is it not on the corpse?”

“...I don’t think so… hm, at least, I don’t think so, no?”

Albedo went silent alongside Ainz, and then her eyes sparkled.

“Ah! It seems I misspoke. Ainz-sama, you are correct. It is not on the corpse, but the soul!”

“Indeed. In Demiurge’s experiments, the severed limbs vanished and grew from the body once more. Now, when you cast a spell on the soul, what will happen to the body?”

In YGGDRASIL, one could choose to come back to life at one of four locations when casting an XP-draining resurrection spell.

The first was at the corpse itself. The second was at the entrance of the dungeon or other location. The third was in a nearby safe town. And the fourth would be at a designated respawn point within a guild base or other stronghold.

That being the case, where would people in this world come back to life when resurrection magic was cast on them?

The scenario which Ainz most wanted to avoid was the fourth kind, coming back to life at a designated home point. If Nigun came back to life in the Slaine Theocracy, Ainz would have essentially resurrected an enemy, filled him full of useful information, and then kindly released him back into the wild.

This was why he could not conduct experiments with resurrection magic, but in return it had led to these undesired consequences.

“I see, so that’s how it is. We must take note of these things. As expected of you, Ainz-sama — I am awed by your keen insight.”

As he watched Albedo lower her head in admiration, Ainz immediately shook his head and replied:

“Pay it no heed. Although, I do need to find a place to contact an experiment like that… hm. Then, once we’re ready, we’ll set out.”

Under Albedo’s guidance, Ainz strode into the forest.

♦♦♦

The two of them reached a large clearing within the woods.

One could say this scene was filled with a rustic charm, but in the middle of it stood something that was completely out of place here — a person in a suit of crimson full plate armor. It was a fantastic sight as it glittered under the sunlight, but the stink of gore it gave off ruined the atmosphere.

It was Shalltear.

She looked exactly like what he had seen on the [Crystal Monitor], right down to her seemingly-unchanged posture.  For a moment, Ainz wondered if he was still looking at her image.

However, it felt real enough. The reason was that was the stench of blood carried to him by the wind.

Ainz breathed in and out repeatedly. Of course, his body could not breathe, so he was just going through the motions, but perhaps he felt something which might have led to those breaths.

“Shalltear,” Ainz said to her.

He felt that his voice should have been stern and commanding, and yet the words he had spoken were hoarse and quiet and pathetic.

Yet, there was no response.

Before he called out to Shalltear again, Ainz carefully sized her up.

Shalltear was not ignoring him. Rather, her crimson eyes were open and vacuous, giving the impression that there was no consciousness there.

Albedo, who was standing beside him, grew furious at Shalltear’s attitude.

“Shalltear! Not only do you not have an explanation for your deeds, but you compound it with rudeness to Ainz-sama—”

“Albedo, shut up! Keep quiet! Don ot move! Do not approach Shalltear!”

Ainz’s harsh words stopped Albedo in her tracks as she was about to advance on Shalltear. This was a tone he very rarely took with the NPCs made by his friends, but on this occasion, it could not be helped.

That was how shocked Ainz was by Shalltear's current condition.

"...Could this be… is it even possible? ...Unbelievable."

Ainz compared scenes from his past to the Shalltear he saw before him, and shock ran through him. At the same time, his emotion suppression kicked in, allowing him to make a calm decision and realize that the possibility he had in mind was the most likely one.

Ainz addressed Albedo. He wanted to share his thoughts, and by doing so, acknowledge the reality of the situation.

"I'm sure of it now. Shalltear is under mind control."

"Is this due to the reason you mentioned in the Throne Room, Ainz-sama?"

"I can't be sure just yet… judging from the information supplied by the Sunlight Scripture and my own experience with this sort of thing, I'm certain this is some form of mind control. Of course, I don't know how or why the undead Shalltear was controlled. Could this be the result of some phenomenon unique to this world?"

Ainz folded his arms, and carefully  examined the bolt-upright Shalltear.

"Some mysterious person attempted to control Shalltear's mind, but something happened before that person could issue any orders. Perhaps they were struck down just as they made their move… in any case, I'm pretty sure that was what left her standing here by herself, without any orders. However, she will probably defend herself against anyone who gets too close or who attacks her. Most evil-aligned NPCs will do just that, so don't get too close."

"Understood. However, we will not be able to drag her back to

Nazarick like this… That will be fine as long as Shalltear's attempted controller is dead, but if that person is still alive, it will be dangerous to wait here."

"An accurate consideration."

Shalltear had been mind-controlled by *something*. It might be something unique to this world, something that could work on the undead. If that were the case, Ainz might end up getting mind-controlled as well if he stayed here.

"Although this item is quite expensive, we'd best dispel Shalltear's mind control soon as possible."

Ainz's fingers moved. One of the rings he wore, a plain and undecorated item, glowed with a silver light and displayed three meteors on its face. One could say this was the mightiest ring Ainz had in his possession.

"That is…?"

Upon seeing Albedo's puzzled expression, Ainz's face — though his fleshless face could not move — was filled with a proud smile as he spoke the ring's name.

"This is Shooting Star,  an extremely rare item that allows its bearer three uses of the super-tier magic, [Wish Upon a Star]."

This was the gacha item that Ainz had spent his year-end bonus to obtain.

Amon the guild members, only Ainz and Yamaiko could boast ownership of such an unbelievably rare item.

However, this ring was less of an ultra-rare item than a cash item which symbolized foolishness, on account of how much money he had spent on the game in order to obtain it.

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The super-tier spell imbued within the ring, [Wish Upon A Star], was one which consumed a percentage of one's XP to randomly generate an option for a wish.  In other words, by spending 10% of one's XP, one could make one choice. By spending 50%, one could pick from five choices.

There were many choices that could be made for a wish; according to online walkthroughs, there were over 200 of them. In addition, some wishes were more common than others; thus this was a dreadful spell which many feared would deplete their XP for nothing.

Even in YGGDRASIL where gaining levels was easy, one would still need a lot of XP to cast it, given that a magic caster needed to be level 95 before learning this super-tier spell. Thus, many people hesitated over whether or not to gamble their XP on this sort of thing.

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The choices one could make when casting [Wish Upon A Star] from the ring were randomly generated, much like the original spell. However, one was more likely to get useful selections, and fewer joke selections. From a certain point of view, one might say it was a better version of the spell. In addition, one would be presented with up to ten choices to pick from, and there would be no casting time. It was worthy of being called the best cash item.

Of course, it felt like a shame — and a bit of a gamble — to have to use a cash item like this. However, Shalltear was irreplaceable. In addition, using his own leftover XP would affect his use of other skills which drained his XP, so he had his doubts about going that route.

Ainz stared at his ring.

Ainz hoped that he would be given a choice to negate all effects on a given target. He had also thought of several other alternatives, but that was the most direct option which came to mind.

Very few people would pick that wish since it would also negate all positive effects. Thus, Ainz laughed at himself for thinking of it.

“Then, hear me, oh ring. I WISH!”

Of course, he did not need to speak those words to activate the item. However, he was driven by his desire to be granted the most optimal choice from over 200 available options, hence his cry. It was like how one might shout during a tense moment in a game or over a throw of the dice.

Since the magic of this world seemed to operate along the same lines as YGGDRASIL, the ring should be able to remove Shalltear’s mind control. Or rather, that was what Ainz hoped would be the case.

The scenario Ainz most feared — that the spell did not work — did not come to pass. The ring released the magic stored within it into this world… and then the red points of light within Ainz’s eye sockets shrank.

“What… is this…”

It felt as though new information was being entered into his mind — something along the lines of displeasure. At the same time, he felt like he had been connected to something vast — something like joy, perhaps. Many of the emotions Ainz had felt while he was still human washed over him.

Once the ripples of emotion faded away, Ainz realised that [Wish Upon A Star] worked differently here than it did in YGGDRASIL.

When Ainz had first learned of Nfirea’s talent, he had idly wondered if he could steal it with [Wish Upon A Star]. Now, he realized that he could have done it. In this world, [Wish Upon a Star] was a spell that would grant its caster’s wishes. Although it would still expend XP, [Wish Upon A Star] was now a spell that could make the impossible possible. In addition, by sacrificing five levels — 500% of his XP, one could grant even more greater wishes.

With that in mind, Ainz felt certain that he could dispel the magical effects on Shalltear. As triumph surged through him, Ainz shouted:

“Dispel all effects on Shalltear!”

A beat later, the lights in Ainz’s eyes grew steadily larger.

“—What, what is this?”

Albedo realised that something had changed when she saw Ainz’s agitated reaction. She uneasily asked:

“What’s the matter, Ainz-sama?”

Ainz had no time to answer. He was recalling the news he had absorbed from various walkthrough sites, his own long experience with YGGDRASIL, then combining them with what he had learned ever since coming to this world. The most important parts of that was the information concerning the use of [Wish Upon A Star], the spell which had completely overturned Ainz’s accumulated knowledge.

Anxiety and anger filled Ainz as he came to a conclusion. However, he could feel something else even through the emotion suppression that should have kept him calm — fear.

Beaten, Ainz shouted:

“We, we’re falling back! Albedo, over here! We’re retreating now!”

“Y-yes!”

Ainz cast his teleportation spell, and in the next moment, a berm of earth filled his eyes. Though he was now safe at home, Ainz ordered in a panic:

“Albedo! Watch out for anyone who might have teleported after us!”

“Yes!”

Albedo drew her weapon and stood by Ainz’s side. Ainz raised both his hands, taking a stance to deal with anything which might come.

As time passed, Ainz allowed himself to slowly relax. Albedo too stood down from her ready stance, back into her normal posture.

“Dammit!”

After he calmed down, he was filled with furious anger. His emotional peaks were automatically cut out after becoming undead, but even though they were suppressed, the anger welled up inside him once more.

“Dammit! Dammit! Dammit!”

Ainz kicked at the ground over and over again.

Since Ainz's physical strength was far greater than normal, each kick sent forth a massive quantity of soil. If it had not rained just a few days ago, the surrounding area might have been engulfed in a huge cloud of dust. Even so, it could not quench Ainz's anger.

"Ainz, Ainz-sama, please, be at peace…"

Ainz noticed the undercurrent of fear in Albedo's voice, and he finally realized that his behavior was not fitting of an absolute ruler. He swiftly calmed himself down, forcefully exhaling the breath he did not possess. It felt as though he was expelling the fiery wrath consuming him through that breath.

"...Forgive me. I seem to have lost my senses for a moment. Pay that unsightly scene no heed."

"Please do not say that. However, I am grateful that you tpok my suggestion to heart, Ainz-sama. If it is your wish that I forget ever seeing that, then I shall remove it from my mind. However — what happened? Did I displease you, Ainz-sama? If you are willing to tell me, I shall strive not to let it happen again."

"...My anger was not directed at you, Albedo. It was because I learned that my wish did not come true, even after activating the power of the ring."

Seeing how Albedo remained silent, Ainz knew that his explanation was insufficient, so he continued:

"...There is only one thing which can trump the power of the super-tier spell [Wish Upon A Star]."

Perhaps earlier, he might have thought it was interference from something in this world, but Ainz was confident that it was not the case. This was because he had sensed it as he activated the ring.

“It, it can’t be… that would be…”

“Yes, Albedo. There is only one thing which can do that… the power of World-Class Items.”

There were only 200 of these items in YGGDRASIL, and not even Guild Weapons or divine-class items could compare to them. The power of World-Class Items was such that even controlling the undead — who were immune to mental effects — would be a piece of cake.

Just then, Albedo though of the Guardians outside Nazarick, and how they might become targets.

He rebuked himself for not thinking of this possibility, and then Ainz ordered Albedo:

“Albedo, recall all the Guardians from the outside world immediately. We must verify if they have been controlled like Shalltear. Head to the Throne Room without delay! After that, we shall proceed... to the Treasury.”

# Overlord Volume 3 Chapter 4

## Before the Death Match

OVERLORD [3] The bloody valkyrie
4章 死戦を前に

*Translator: Nigel*
*Editors/Proofreader: JcqC*

## Part 1

After teleporting into the Treasury, the first thing Ainz saw was countless lights glittering in the air, like stars in the sky.

The ceiling was so high that one would have to strain to see its heights, and its walls were so broad that they exceeded the range of one's vision. The vast room they defined was filled with dazzling treasures.

In the center of the room was a heaping pile of gold coins and gems, so immense that it resembled a mountain range. Even the amount which could be seen to be counted was but a tiny fraction of the actual sum. In addition, there were masterfully-made works of art buried in the mountain of gold.

A quick glance revealed a golden mug, a scepter encrusted with all manner of gemstones, a crystal pitcher, an animal pelt which emitted a platinum radiance, an exquisitely-woven tapestry made with thread-of-gold, a pearl-colored ocarina, a fan made of rainbow-colored feathers, a mask made from animal hide, and many, many more.

Needless to say, they were but the tip of the iceberg.

There were hundreds more such articles buried within that gigantic heap of riches. As his followers beheld this literal mountain of treasure, Ainz could hear whispered gasps of awe from them. It would seem the voices came from two people.

*66%, huh...*

Ainz looked behind him, at the three women waiting for orders.

Albedo had shed her armor and changed back into her white dress. There was a look of genuine admiration on her beautiful face as she looked around her surroundings. A similar expression adorned the face of Yuri Alpha, the maid to whom he had given his ring upon returning to Nazarick.

Only one of them was unlike the previous two. That person did not gasp in awe, but instead watched Ainz in silence.

Her face was a work of sculpted beauty. Only one of her eyes — which radiated a cool glow like a cut emerald — was visible, the other being covered up by an eyepatch. Her strawberry-blonde hair gleamed as it reflected the starlight which shone from the ceiling.

She was a heteromorphic being, of the kind known as Automatons. Her name was CZ2128 Delta, or Shizu for short.

As a Pleiades Battle Maid, she was dressed similarly to Narberal and Yuri. However, the biggest difference in her outfit from the others was that all her accessories were done up in an urban camouflage pattern, while her skirt had a cute “1-yen” sticker on it. In addition, she had a firearm of some sort at her waist, attached to her belt like a sword.

Incidentally, that magic gun, the Automaton race, and Shizu’s job class of Gunner had all been added to the game after the large-scale update called “Valkyrie’s Downfall”.

Yuri adjusted her lensless black spectacle frames. She seemed unable to abide the mess around her, given her sense of duty as a maid. Then, she asked:

“Ainz-sama, may I ask why these treasures have not been tidied up? Even if there are protective spells in effect, this is hardly an ideal storage method. You have but to command us and we will immediately begin tidying—”

“Look closely around you one more time.”

Yuri looked around, taking about the time of a single breath, and then she apologized.

“My sincerest apologies. Please forgive my lack of insight.”

“Pay it no heed. However, the fact is that the items buried within the gold pieces are hardly valuable.”

The places where Ainz had looked and where Yuri’s eyes had followed were the reason for her apology. There were shelves everywhere, piled all the way up to the ceiling, and the treasures there were more eye-catching than the mountains of gold.

There was a wand socketed with bloodstones, a pair of hihiirokane gauntlets inlaid with garnets, a small silver ring adorned with black diamonds, an obsidian statuette carved in the shape of a dog, a purple amethyst dagger, a miniature altar with countless small white pearls embedded all over it, a peony made from some glass-like material which scattered light in all the colors of the rainbow, a rose blossom which had been masterfully carved from a star ruby, a tapestry which depicted a soaring black dragon, a crown of platinum which held an enormous diamond, golden censers that were encrusted in gemstones, a mated pair of a male and female lion statuettes, carved from ruby and sapphire respectively, cufflinks which looked like flames and which had fire opals set into them, an intricately-carved cigar case made of rosewood, a jacket made of some golden beast's pelt, a dozen plates made of apoitakara, anklets decorated with gemstones of four colors, a grimoire whose cover was made of demantoids, a human-sized statue of a woman which had been carved from gold, a belt with imperial topazes sewn into its material, a chess set whose pieces were all topped in different gemstones, a statuette of a fairy carved from a single piece of emerald, a black cloak that was decorated with countless small gemstones, a drinking horn made from a unicorn's horn, a golden dais that held a crystal ball, and so on.

This was but a fraction of the wonders therein.

In addition, there were many mirrors of blue topaz, red crystals that were the size of a man, a gigantic platinum statue of a warrior, a pillar covered in mysterious characters, as well as a gigantic alexandrite which one would need both arms to fully embrace.

These numberless treasures gave Yuri her answer; which was that there was simply no place to put them.

“Let's go.”

Albedo and Yuri answered Ainz in the affirmative. Only Shizu remained silent, merely nodding in acknowledgement.

Ainz cast [Mass Fly], and then the four of them took off.

It was then that they realized that a faint purple poisonous gas hung in the air.

Yuri looked around to find the source of the purple gas, but though she looked to the ceiling, the walls, and the corners, she could not pinpoint the source of the purple radiance.

Just as confusion bloomed on Yuri’s face, a monotonous voice answered her:

“...Yuri-nee. Powerful magic toxin in the air.”

“Eh?”

Yuri’s surprised answer was met by a cold, inscrutable look. That look came from Shizu’s calm green eye, which was devoid of any emotion.

One would not be able to pick up any emotion from those eyes. Shizu had a beautiful face, but if one were to be ungenerous, one could call it an actor’s mask.

After all, Shizu was an automaton. She would not show any emotions — indeed, that was how she had been programmed.

“...Blood of Jormungandr?”

As Shizu named that most potent of poisons, Ainz replied:

“Mm, that’s correct. I didn’t tell you, but the air in the Treasury is toxic. Anyone without poison immunity or items granting it will die within three steps.”

“Would that be why you chose me — forgive me, why you chose the three of us to accompany you?”

Indeed it was.

Yuri — who was adjusting her glasses — was a Dullahan, while the stiff-faced Shizu was an Automaton. The two of them were heteromorphic beings who were immune to poison as part of their racial features.

Albedo was a demon and did not naturally possess a resistance to poisons, but she had another way to render herself immune to them.

“You’re right in the reason for which I brought you here… However, I brought Shizu for more than just that; she is also here for verification.”

Ainz and his entourage crossed the mountain range of gold with the [Mass Fly] spell, and then they came to the door on the other side.

No, was it right to call it a door? It was more of a bottomless black shadow in the shape of a door, affixed to a wall.

As they arrived before this painting-like door, Ainz fell into thought.

“This is the armory, so what is the password…”

“Ainz-sama, if there is an armory, does this mean that there are other treasures stored in other locations?”

*...Eh? Does Albedo not know about the interior of the Treasury?*

Ainz had no idea why Albedo would have such doubts. However, it was understandable why she would not know about such things. After all, the Treasury did not exist within the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick proper, but could only be reached via the use of the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown. It was designed to be very difficult to infiltrate. Thus, it was only natural why Albedo — who had only received the ring ten days ago — would not know of such things.

He had many questions about what exactly the NPCs knew, but after thinking about it, Ainz dismissed those concerns as trivial, and answered her question.

“Ah, yes. I had a friend called Genjiro. He liked sorting things out neatly, so he should have arranged the items by their intended purpose.”

“Is he the Supreme Being who made our comrade Entoma?”

“Yes, that’s right, Yuri. However, it seems there was an exception to his orderly tendencies. If he was truly obsessed with cleanliness, then the treasures among the gold pieces should have been tidily arranged as well. One would not want to say that one’s room was filthy, after all. Come to think of it, these items should be arranged in order of defensive gear, weapons, jewellery, wondrous items, consumables, crafting supplies, and so on. Also, there’s the rooms for the management of Nazarick… and yes, there should be a room for data crystals.”

As Ainz chattered on, he pointed to where a two-dimensional shadow now appeared on the wall.

“However, they’re all located in the same place inside, and it doesn’t really matter which direction you enter from… oh, my apologies. I seem to have said too much.”

“Certainly not. I am grateful that you would answer our questions so readily, Ainz-sama.”

The two battle maids bowed in thanks as Albedo made her reply.

*We’re almost out of time, what the hell am I doing? It seems like my mouth won’t stop whenever I talk about the glories of Nazarick...*

Ainz shrugged, and then looked to the shadow before him.

This was a door which required a certain password to open. Perhaps one could force it open with magic or rogue skills, but Ainz did not know spells like that, not did he have such skills. Thus, he had to speak the password—

*Hm, I forgot it.*

That was only to be expected.

There were so many such gimmicks in Nazarick that he would probably only be able to remember a password if it was one he used frequently. However, given that he did not come to the Treasury often, he did not remember the password to this door.

He had only come here when paying for the upkeep costs of Nazarick with the money he had earned, and that had been years ago.

Since he could not remember the password, Ainz spoke a master password:

"All glory to Ainz Ooal Gown."

In response, the jet-black door displayed a series of words: *"Ascendit a terra in coelum, iterumque descendit in terram, et recipit vim superiorum et inferiorum."*

(TL Note: This is an excerpt from the Emerald Tablet, AKA the Tabula Smaragdina.)

“...Tabula Smaragdina-san really was a perfectionist.”

Albedo reacted to those words which Ainz could not help but mention.

Ainz thought of one of the people who had designed the tricks and traps used by Ainz Ooal Gown.

He had a hand in designing about 20% of the smaller mechanisms throughout the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. His abnormally intricate designs consumed much of Nazarick’s free data capacity, which caused the other members to complain about being unable to indulge themselves. Thus, he took responsibility for his actions and paid for many cash items to expand said data capacity.

Ainz studied the words which appeared. This must be a hint for the password, but what could it mean?

He racked his brains, taking his time to plumb the depths of his mind for the answer.

Soon, Ainz finally found the password, which slumbered within his memories.

“It should be — *By this means you shall acquire the glory of the whole world, / And so you shall drive away all shadows and* *blindness* — am I correct?”

As Ainz said this, he looked to Shizu with questioning eyes.

Shizu nodded in response to him.

She had been made by one of his friends who had worked on different mechanisms from Tabula Smaragdina. Shizu’s backstory had been written so that she would be familiar with the bypassing of Nazarick’s mechanisms. This was why she could easily solve that password hint.

However, Ainz had not asked her for help because he wanted to indulge the selfish desire to open the door through his own efforts.

The Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had been brought to life when it came to this new world. Therefore, he wanted to be the first to set his feet here, much like how men wanted to leave their footprints on freshly-fallen snow. It was that desire which drove Ainz to open the door on his own.

As though in response to Ainz’s wishes, the shadow-door collapsed into a single point. Soon, the shadow was gone, leaving a fist-sized sphere of blackness floating in the air.

Now that the shadow had vanished, one could see into the tunnel that had been left behind. This was an orderly place, completely unlike the previous area. The best way to describe it would be something like a display from a museum.

The dimly-lit room was very long and stretched ever inward.

The ceiling was about five meters above the ground, a height which was clearly not designed with humans in mind, while it was about ten meters from one wall to the other.

The ground was made of tightly-fit, shiny black stone blocks, and it looked like a single gigantic stone slab.

Neat rows of countless weapons were arrayed on the walls to Ainz's left and right, making an impressive display.

"I'm going in."

Ainz entered the Armory without waiting for his three followers to respond.

What awaited the three of them were broadswords, greatswords, estocs, flamberges, scimitars, patas, shotels, kukris, claymores, short swords, sword breakers...

Of course, swords were not the only weapons here. There were one-handed axes, two-handed axes, one-handed bludgeons, javelins, bows, crossbows...

Just the types alone were almost uncountable.

In addition, there were many unrealistic weapons here that stretched the definition of actually being called weapons. Those were the kind that could not possibly be sheathed, or which were more decorative than useful, and so on. No, these weapons were in the majority.

Almost none of them were made of anything as ordinary as mere steel.

There was a sword with a blade of blue crystal, a pure-white sword with gold inlays and engravings, a black sword with purple runes along its body, and even a bow that seemed to have been strung with pure light.

Then there were other weapons that looked dangerous even at a glance.

There was a two-handed axe whose blade constantly dripped fresh blood. Tormented faces appeared and vanished on the black metal of a gigantic mace. There was a lance that resembled human hands clasping each other. And then there were many more weapons like these, in amounts which defied easy counting.

One could guess that most of them were magic weapons, but the exact effect each of them had was a mystery. One might be able to guess at the purpose of a sword whose blade flickered like a flame, but it was impossible to know the abilities of a sword whose blade looked like a whip and which wriggled like a centipede.

The group looked at these weapons on either side as they silently walked through the Armory. Before long — about 100 meters and thousands of weapons later — they reached their destination, which was a rectangular room.

It might have been used to receive guests, since there was a table and sofa set in the middle of the otherwise-empty room. There were other passages visible to the left and right which looked similar to the one through which Ainz and company had entered.

There was only one route which led further on, in contrast to the way they had entered. The atmosphere of that way was also dramatically different. If the previous room had been like a museum, then the next one was like a tomb.

The height of the room was about the same as the previous one, but the dim interior extended further in. It was hard to tell due to the angles, but it looked like there was a large niche set into the wall, with something placed within it.

After hearing the sounds of surprise from behind him, Ainz said:

“Within lies the Mausoleum.”

“The Mausoleum?”

“Hm? Albedo… do you not know the name of that room?”

*Well, I did pick that name myself… If it’s like just now, Albedo might not even know the name of the Treasury’s Guardian…*

“Then, do you know of Pandora’s Actor?”

“Yes, I do. As the Guardian Overseer, I am aware of his name and appearance… Pandora’s Actor is the Area Guardian of the Treasury, and his abilities are on par with myself and Demiurge. Other than managing the Treasury, his purpose is also to prepare the currency needed to activate Nazarick’s defense network. In other words, he is a treasurer.”

“That’s pretty much it. However, that is not all. That fellow—”

Before Ainz could finish, he was interrupted — the three NPCs turned to look at one of the other passages and saw an entity there.

That being had a bizarre appearance.

While it had a man’s body, its head was that of a distorted squid. The right side of its head was half-covered in a twisted, tattooed letters, which resembled the ones that had floated up on the door just now.

Its skin was like that of a corpse, with purple blotches amidst a ghastly white color, and it was covered in some sort of sticky slime that gave off a bizarre sheen. Webs of skin grew between the long digits of its four-fingered hands.

Its body was covered in a shiny, form-fitting black leather outfit studded with silver jewelry. Several belts wrapped around it. Its black cape was closed in front of it, as if to conceal its body.

It was the very picture of a heteromorphic character. The six twitching tentacles which sprouted from its mouth dangled down to its thighs, and it turned its cloudy blue pupil-less eyes to survey the group.

Albedo cried out in surprise:

“Tabula Smaragdina-sama!”

This was one of the 41 Supreme Beings. As a magic caster, he was superior to Ainz in terms of attack power.

“No, that’s not right!” she immediately continued.

The two maids watched Albedo’s reaction and swiftly moved into action.

Shizu drew her gun and braced its stock against her shoulder, levelling her muzzle at the person before her.

Yuri clenched her fists in front of her chest, and punched her gauntlets together, which made a sound like a ringing gong.

Then, she slid next to Albedo’s side, in front of Ainz and Shizu. Ainz was a magic caster while Shizu was a gunner, neither of whom did well in close combat. Thus, this was the ideal position for her to be in order to cover for them.

“Who are you?! Even if you disguise yourself and your presence as a Supreme Being, I would not mistake my own master for anyone else!”

The mysterious being who looked like Tabula Smaragdina merely inclined its head at Albedo’s question, but did not make any reply.

“—Really now. Kill it.”

As that cold voice rang forth, the two battle maids hesitated. Though this was an unknown opponent, they were still a little reluctant to attack someone who resembled one of their creators.

Under these circumstances, one could not fault the battle maids. All that could be said was that Albedo’s calm judgement was impeccable.

Their top priority was the safety of their ward, Ainz.

Albedo clicked her tongue as the other two failed to act. Just as she was about to charge, a distinctly unhappy Ainz said:

“That’s enough. Return to your true form, Pandora’s Actor!”

Tabula Smaragdina’s body distorted.

In the space of a heartbeat, another heteromorphic being stood where the impostor Tabula Smaragdina had been, though it was something else entirely.

Its face was flat, with no nose or other facial features. Its mouth and eyes were replaced by three empty holes. There were no eyeballs, teeth or a tongue; just three black holes which looked like they had been drawn on by a child with a black marker.

The pink, egg like head was smooth and shiny, without a single hair to mar its surface.

This strange character — and Narberal — were both Doppelgangers.

His name was Pandora’s Actor, and he was a level 100 NPC personally designed by Ainz and placed in charge of the Treasury. His talents lay in disguise, and he could copy 45 separate forms and even their abilities — though only at 80% of the originals’ potency.

His hat bore the crest of Ainz Ooal Gown, while the uniform he wore was very similar to the uniforms used by Neo-Nazi elite guards during the Euro-Arcology Wars 20 years ago.

After forcefully clicking his heels together, he raised his right hand to his cap in a grossly overacted salute.

“I bid you a fond welcome, my creator, Momonga-sama!”

“...You seem quite lively.”

“Indeed! I burst with energy every day! Speaking of which, may I know the purpose for which you have come? And to think you would have in your train these fair maidens, the Guardian Overseer and the Pleiades Battle Maids!”

Yuri and Albedo returned to their positions behind Ainz after the Area Guardian revealed himself, although the three of them had different looks on their faces.

Yuri — who took pride in her position as one of the Pleiades — adjusted her glasses and seemed displeased at being called a “fair maiden”. She looked as though she wanted to say something, though ultimately she did not.

Albedo, who stood beside Ainz, seemed to be jealous of the fact that Pandora’s Actor had been created by Ainz and pursed her lips where Ainz could not see her.

Shizu, on the other hand, showed no change in her expression and simply returned her weapon to its place.

“We will be going into the innermost vaults to retrieve World-Class Items.”

“Of what do you speak?! Has the time come to unleash their power?!”

Pandora’s Actor put on an exaggerated look of shock. This act made Ainz furrow his nonexistent eyebrows.

His clothes were one thing, but why did he have to over-react to everything? No, Ainz knew the answer to that.

Ainz was the creator of Pandora’s Actor; in other words, his every move and gesture existed because Ainz thought they were stylish. Thus, he had happily worked them into the character design.

“...Ugh, this is really…”

In the past, he had thought of military uniforms as being very cool, and he believed that actors ought to be dramatic, but watching someone as intelligent like him make such showy motions was—

“Uwah~ how lame~”

Those quiet words slipped free of Ainz’s heart, so softly that nobody heard.

This was his black history.

His living, breathing black history (Pandora’s Actor).

If anyone else in the guild were around to witness this NPC’s conversion into an actual person, they would probably be rolling around on the floor, laughing out loud. Well, that was how he felt; he was not pointing fingers at anyone.

"...Forget it, I need to pull myself together. As one of the undead, I don't have time to be shaken by such psychological blows," Ainz quietly said to himself as he calmed himself down.

"...Mm, you're right. I intend to withdraw [Greed and Generosity], [Hygieia's Chalice], [Billion Blades] and [Depiction of Mountains and Rivers]."

"...And what of the other two?"

"Leave them. They're one-use items. The fact that they're so powerful means you have to think about the right time and place to use them. Then, there's also the matter of how to recover the items to use them again."

"Indeed, it is so. For these legendary treasures, so mighty and potent that they are worthy of being called trump cards, which can make the impossible possible, or even change the face of the entire world—"

"—Pandora's Actor, I'd like to test your knowledge; there are 200 World-Class Items, but how many of them are you familiar with?"

"Forgive me, Momonga-sama, but I only know of 11 of them."

Ainz nodded in acknowledgement. Those were the World-Class Items which Ainz Ooal Gown possessed. He did not know that there was one more, [Atlas], which had been stolen from them. In other words, he had learned that the NPCs' knowledge was affected by their settings, but they could ignore any contradictions in their backstories.

Ainz had observed the NPCs for several days now. He had learned that the NPCs seemed to take after his former guildmates in the parts of the their personalities which were not covered by their character details, as well as in the interpersonal relationships with other NPCs. For instance, the relationship between Shalltear and Aura, or that between Demiurge and Sebas.

Ainz smiled, though his expression did not change.

*So basically, they're like everyone's children.*

It felt like his friends from the past were by his side once more. It gladdened Ainz's heart, but at the same time he felt terribly alone.

Ainz shook his head to disperse his hurt feelings.

"Is that so, Pandora's Actor. I seem to have asked you a pointless question."

"Certainly not; I must tender my sincerest apologies for my lack of knowledge."

With that, he bowed. Every move he made was exaggerated to the point of being ridiculous.

“...Never mind. I will be heading to the Mausoleum soon. Has anything happened here?”

“Of course not; everything within this domain is the sole property of yourself and all your colleagues, Momonga-sama. How could anything happen?”

With a theatrical flourish, he gestured all around him.

“Although, it is with a heavy heart that I confess that I was hoping you intended to make use of my abilities, Momonga-sama.”

Ainz paused, and began sizing up this heteromorphic creature.

He was right; at one point Ainz had indeed intended to make use of him. Pandora’s Actor possessed wit and cunning that ranked among the pinnacle of Nazarick’s denizens. While he usually applied said intelligence toward strange purposes, it was very difficult to cast aside his wisdom during times of great need.

In addition, Pandora’s Actor possessed very flexible abilities, to the point where he could replace all the other Guardians.

However, Ainz had not made him for combat or administrative duties, but to preserve the forms of “Ainz Ooal Gown” and the memories of his comrades.

“...You are my final ace in the hole, so I do not intend to use you for petty tasks.”

“...I am truly grateful for that.”

With a look on his face which suggested that he was hesitant to speak (probably), Pandora’s Actor once more took a deep bow.

“Understood. Then, I shall continue to manage the Treasury from now on.”

“Mm, make me proud. Also, from now onwards, call me Ainz, Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“Ohhhh! I hear and obey, my creator, Ainz-sama!”

After Pandora’s Actor saluted him, Ainz turned away, as if to show that the conversation was over. Just then, a voice came from behind him.

“However, Ainz-sama; though this might offend you, I submit that since a situation has arisen that requires the use of World-Class Items, it might be better for you to permit me to leave the Treasury and move around on other floors.”

“...”

He had a point there.

Pandora’s Actor was a treasure, but it would be foolish to lose more important treasures because all he did was display him rather than use him. Now was the time to deploy of him, given that this was an emergency situation, and he also had to move the Treasury’s gold to the Throne Room.

After making his decision, Ainz turned around, just in time to see Pandora’s Actor placing a hand on his chest, as if to recommend himself.

Ainz also heard a quiet “uwah~” from the otherwise expressionless Shizu.

That sound carved a grievous wound into Ainz’s soul — although his emotional suppression immediately calmed him down.

Pandora’s Actor was indeed far too dramatic, and it made his creator (Ainz) think that every single movement he made was designed to scream “I am cool”.

Perhaps such actions would fit him if he was a handsome man, but instead he was an egghead, which made them terribly unfitting. It even made Ainz feel uneasy when he saw him.

Ainz quietly studied Pandora’s Actor for a while, and then he plucked a ring from his pocket dimension and tossed it to him.

The ring traced an arc through the air, landing neatly in the hand of

Pandora's Actor.

"This… is the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, and it possesses the ability to..."

Ainz held up a hand, as though to tell Pandora's Actor not to go on. Although he seemed quite disappointed,  Ainz decided to pay him no heed.

"This is just in case. Albedo, inform the vassals of Nazarick about Pandora's Actor. Before that, you are only to travel between the Throne Room and the Treasury, Pandora's Actor."

"Understood."

The two of them responded at the same time, but Pandora's Actor clicked his heels together with great force, tossing out his arm which was straightened all the way to the tips of his fingers and saluted with great pomp and circumstance… or to put it less kindly, he was hamming it up.

Ainz looked at his egghead, and gently shook his head.

He was not a bad sort, and he was quite capable, but regretfully—

"Uwah~"

*Why did I design him with such a personality? I used to think this* *sort of thing was so cool. No, actually, I still think his uniform is kind of cool...*

If Ainz could have blushed, his face would be bright red.

“Oi, Pandora’s Actor.”

Ainz grabbed Pandora’s Actor by the shoulders and pulled him aside, as if to say “Come with me.” Of course, he told Albedo and the maids to stay where they were.

“I have an important question for you. I am your creator, and the one you are loyal to, right?”

“Indubitably so, Ainz-sama! For as I was made by you, if you desire me to do battle with the other Supreme Beings, I shall charge into the fray without hesitation!”

“I see… then, I have a request for you as a human being… no, a man… no, as your creator… But could you please not salute any more?”

Pandora’s Actor locked his vacant eyes with Ainz’s own, his confusion at Ainz’s words evident within them.

“Er, that… how shall I put it, your saluting is pretty weird, so please don’t salute any more… As for your uniform, it makes you look very strong, so we’ll leave that be… but please, really, don’t salute any more.”

“Wenn es meines Gottes Wille!”

(TL Note: If this is my God’s will!)

“Is that German? Don’t speak like that either. No, you may use it if you please, but just not in front of me. I’m begging you.”

“Y-yes…”

This was the first time Pandora’s Actor had such a look of shock on his face, and his answer seemed a little strange. After realizing their faces were close enough for a kiss, Ainz backed off and asked weakly:

“Please, I’m begging you. I didn’t think my emotion override would trigger over something like this. It’s worse than riding a giant hamster… I can hardly believe it myself. Although I’d like to discuss the matter in greater detail, the situation is quite urgent, so we’ll leave it at this for now.”

♦♦♦

“Then, there’s something which has to be done before entering the Mausoleum. Albedo, leave the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown which I gave you with Pandora’s Actor.”

Ainz explained the reason for that to a confused Albedo.

“This is the final trap emplaced here; the Avataras within are programmed to attack anyone with a Ring, even if that person is you or me.”

“I see… intruders would use the Ring to get here. Thus, they would trigger that final trap.”

“Evil, don’t you think?”

“Of, of course not!”

Albedo reluctantly plucked the Ring from her left ring finger, folding it into a silk handkerchief before handing it to Pandora’s Actor. As he saw this, Ainz removed his ring as well, and placed it into a box that he had produced from thin air.

“Ah!” Ainz exclaimed. He seemed to have thought of something. He placed the ring with the box which contained all the other rings that he had not yet decided to gift to people.

This was because he would still be considered to have the ring on even if it were in his pocket dimension, which would result in the Avataras attacking him if he entered the Mausoleum.

“Albedo-sama… could you please let go?”

As he heard that vaguely annoyed voice, Ainz turned to see Albedo and Pandora’s Actor playing tug-of-war with the silk handkerchief.

“My, my precious…”

“Ainz-sama said so, didn’t he? If you wear the Ring, you’ll be attacked. It’s just taking it off for a while…”

“What are you saying? This is the Ring which Ainz-sama gave me! How could I—!”

“...Albedo, there’s no time for this. If you’re unwilling to leave it with him, then I shall...”

“My apologies, I’m ready now!”

Albedo suddenly let go, making Pandora’s Actor lose his balance and stumble back with a cry.

“Is that so… then enter. Pandora’s Actor, you will direct Yuri and Shizu to move some of the treasure to the Throne Room… Though it might be troublesome, be considerate of Albedo and do not use her Ring. Instead, use the one I gave you.”

“Thank you very much, Ainz-sama! I cannot bear the thought of others using the Ring that you personally gifted to me. But — Of — Course — since this is an emergency, it is not that I am truly unwilling. I just wish to let you know how much I value that ring, Ainz-sama, although I am sure that you already know that even without the need for me to—”

“—Understood! ...Then, who shall stay here and receive Ainz-sama when he returns?”

A look that ill-fitted an elegant beauty crossed Albedo’s face as Pandora’s Actor interrupted her self-promotion. Ainz decided to look away from Albedo in that state, so as not to mar the image of the beautiful maiden in his mind.

“We should be some time. I will notify you with a [Message] and you can return to us then. After all, we cannot leave this place without a Ring.”

“Understood.”

Ainz and Albedo entered the Mausoleum, under the eyes of Pandora’s Actor and the two maids.

This dimly-lit place was deathly silent, and it seemed like a suitable place for the spirits of the departed to rest. Ainz felt somewhat guilty about breaking the silence here, but nevertheless, he opened his mouth and asked the person travelling beside him:

“That’s right, Albedo: what do you know about World-Class Items?”

“From what I can tell, they are the most valuable treasures that the Supreme Beings have collected. They are deeply cherished and one of them is in my possession… but that is all.”

“I see. Then, on some other day, I shall commit what I know about the World-Class Items to paper. It will be safer to let more people know about that information. Before that, however, I shall inform you about these dangerous items.”

Ainz began talking about them as he walked.

♦♦♦

World-Class Items.

These items were closely linked to the game world of YGGDRASIL.

The World Tree YGGDRASIL had countless leaves, but then a gigantic monster appeared which devoured these leaves, causing them to fall one after the other, until only nine were left. These nine leaves were the previous incarnations of the Nine Worlds: Asgard, Alfheim, Vanaheim, Nidavellir, Midgard, Jotunheim, Niflheim, Helheim and Muspelheim.

However,that leaf-eating monster continued its advance on those nine remaining leaves. This was the backstory upon which the players adventured into unknown worlds in order to protect their own world.

What did those World-Class Items represent? They were equivalent to those other leaves — in other words, a single World-Class Item represented a world. Thus, the basic design principle of World-Class Items was that they possessed enormous power, and indeed, many

World-Class Items were extremely powerful.

Many players had even expressed the opinion that these items were too imbalanced, but the developers simply replied: “The possibilities of the world are not so small”, and showed no intention of changing these balance breakers.

The developers seemed to have a soft spot for the word “World”, and so any class or monster with “World” in its name was usually much stronger than normal.

To the developers, the incredibly powerful last boss of the main campaign storyline — known as the “World Eater” — was the signature World-Class Enemy. In addition, only the winners of a tournament held in each world could become a “World Champion”.

♦♦♦

Just as Ainz got to that part, the two of them arrived at two neatly flanking rows of niches, each filled with a statue dressed in battle gear.

This place resembled the Lemegeton, down to its magic arrays and the mood in the air. However, while the Demons of the Lemegeton were not armed, all the statues here sported incredibly powerful gear, and their potency rivalled Ainz’s primary battle equipment.

“Ai-Ainz-sama, are these statues made in imitation of the Supreme Beings…”

“So you noticed. That’s right — the Avataras are statues made in the image of my former comrades. Still… while you can tell they’re very strong, they look ugly, don’t they? I don’t think I managed to capture even 10% of their coolness…”

“As one who was created by the Supreme Beings, there is no way I could not notice.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, just so. However, Ainz-sama… from the name of this place, and these statues… Could it be that the other Supreme Beings have passed away?”

“That… is not exactly correct.”

*No, perhaps that was the right answer.*

Ainz halted in his tracks, and quietly looked over the statues as that thought ran through his head.

Albedo had no idea what to make of Ainz’s silence, and a look of unease spread over her face.

No man could possibly be unmoved by a sad look on a world-class beauty like her. In addition, she was the loving handiwork of one of his past comrades. Though Ainz was undead, his heart still filled up with guilt and anxiety.

However, Ainz had never had a girlfriend, or even friends in real life, so he had no idea what he could say to comfort her or show sympathy. Panicking, Ainz looked desperately around, trying to think of something to say.

Just then, Ainz noticed something, and he reflexively spoke.

“You, you see, those four empty spaces?”

After making sure that Albedo’s eyes were turned in that direction, Ainz explained why there were no statues in there.

“I shall put my own Avatara in one of these niches.”

Of course not.

The fact was, Ainz was the one who had built and emplaced the Avataras. Because of that, if Ainz left the game, there would be nobody to put Ainz’s Avatara there for him, given that nobody else remained in the guild.

His Guild members had said, “You can have them”, and then left the game after transferring their equipment and cash items to him. Ainz had then used cash items of his own to make these golems, in order to put their equipment to use, and to serve as a memorial for his friends who had left the game.

This was also why the Avataras looked so ugly.

When making Pandora’s Actor, Ainz had the visual data of his guild members on hand, but Ainz did not possess the ability or skills needed to make a character which could look like the guild members from scratch.

Thus, he used purchased visual data and installed it into a golem’s body. The result was these nightmarish monsters, whose limbs were too long or too short, or whose heads were overly enlarged.

However, that mismatched hideousness lent them a sinister air and induced intense unease in people. Therefore, from the point of view of making a set of final guardians, Ainz considered them to have turned out surprisingly well.

*How should I say this… they look like puppets I made when I was a kid. It’s kind of embarrassing...*

Besides embarrassment, however, there was another emotion which Ainz felt.

That was loneliness.

When his comrades left the game one after the other, Ainz made the Avataras to store their equipment. Those friends of his who had not left the game had once asked him why he had made the Avataras, and this was how he had answered:

He might need to use them as a final defensive line of guardians.

However, as the number of members steadily decreased, the motivation behind the creation of the Avataras was simply because he was lonely. After all, he had fewer and fewer friends who could play the game with him.

He had made the Avataras to symbolize the struggles he and his friends had shared in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, and to compensate for their absence.

This was also the reason why this place was called the Mausoleum. Initially, it was known as the Innermost Sanctum of the Treasury. But Ainz had changed its name in memory of those friends who had left — or rather, vanished from — YGGDRASIL, and turned this place into a resting place for his comrades.

*—That said, I still want to believe that my friends were brought here as well. For all I know, everyone might be in some corner of this world...*

Just as Ainz sank into deep thought, a pained cry echoed through the passage.

“Please don’t — please do not say that!”

The loneliness he had felt vanished in an instant, and as Ainz hurriedly turned to look at Albedo, an even more powerful sense of surprise assaulted him. Albedo’s eyes brimmed with tears, and it seemed like they would flow freely if she just blinked a little.

“...Ainz-sama. Our merciful, compassionate master Ainz-sama, the only one of the Supreme Beings who stayed with us to the end, the one to whom we owe our ultimate loyalty — please do not say that. It is my sincerest wish that you will be our lord and master for all eternity!”

Albedo fell to her knees before Ainz.

Her voice was choked as she hoarsely repeated “Please… please”. It sounded like a prayer and a cry of pain — as though she were coughing up blood — at the same time.

Ainz had never seen anyone plead so earnestly in the course of his entire life.

He had not expected his jest to have such an effect on Albedo, and Ainz was filled with guilt as he reached down to help up the kneeling Albedo.

“Forgive me.”

Had he not once thought that his own friends had abandoned him?

Had he not felt despair every day he was alone in the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, because nobody else was around?

Had he not felt anger from that loneliness?

Knowing this misery and bitterness, why had he not understood Albedo’s feelings? Why had he subjected Albedo to this pain?

After helping her up, Ainz saw that Albedo’s face was streaked with tears, and her eyes were still moist.

Ainz produced a handkerchief, and clumsily tried to wipe away her tears.

“...”

He wanted to apologize again — but in the end he said nothing, for want of suitable words.

He lacked experience with interpersonal relationships, and did not know how to comfort her and stop her tears.

At her wits’ end, the sniffling Albedo pleaded with Ainz:

“Ai-Ainz-sama, p-please promise me, promise me you will not abandon us and leave!”

“...I’m sorry, but…”

Ainz could not continue after the “but”. That was because he had thought of something, but Albedo seemed to have assumed his silence was due to another reason.

“Why? Why can’t you promise me that? Were you planning on abandoning us as well? Why? What has displeased you! All you need to do is explain and I shall correct myself immediately! If you consider me a hindrance, then I shall end my life on the spot!”

“No!” Ainz shouted. Albedo’s shoulders lurched in shock.

“Please listen to me. First, currently… there is no way to save Shalltear. Her mind control is definitely the effect of a World-Class Item. The only way to protect against the effects of a World-Class Item is to have a World-Class Item yourself, or a special job class.”

Ainz wiped Albedo’s tears away as though she were a child. She sniffled, and then asked:

“So, so the reason you, you came here was, to withdraw a World-Class Item?”

“Correct. I wanted the Guardians to have World-Class Items of their own. The fact is, one could probably undo Shalltear’s mind control with a similar World-Class Item, but I don’t know if I should use the World-Class Items within… what a heartless master I am. To think I would actually value a measly little item over one of my loyal subordinates.”

“That, that’s not true! The World-Class items were gathered through the efforts of the Supreme Beings, and so they are more valuable than we are!”

“...Really now?”

If they were in the game, Ainz would agree with her, though part of him would feel otherwise.

However, under these circumstances, the fact was that Ainz could not bring himself to use these trump cards.

Among all the balance-breaking World-Class Items, there were the twenty items known as “the Twenty”. The Twenty possessed unparallelled power.

There was a famous item among the Twenty called [Longinus], which could completely delete its target, but the price the user paid for that was to be utterly deleted himself.

There was no way to restore the data of anyone deleted by that World-Class item, other than by using the resurrection powers of other World-Class Items. Neither cash items or resurrection spells would work. If someone were to use it on an NPC of Nazarick, it would even reduce the maximum levels of NPCs which could be created — the special feature of a guild homebase.

Ainz recalled several other equally insane items.

There was [Ahura Mazda], which had a potent effect on anything with a negative karma value, and its area of effect could span an entire world.

There was [Five-Element Progression], which could request the YGGDRASIL developers to change part of the magic system.

There was also [Ouroboros], which could request a more far-reaching change to the system than [Five-Element Progression].

Then, there was the most powerful World-Class Item, [World Savior]. Normally, it only had the power of an ordinary club, but it could grow in strength without limit. A single enemy with this item could conquer the whole of Nazarick, even at the height of its power with all its members present.

The items known as the Twenty were so powerful that they would vanish after being used once, which was why he could not bear to use them lightly, but instead treated them as trump cards.

Ainz Ooal Gown proudly boasted possession of two of the Twenty. They would only be used against enemies of incredible power, because only items of matching power could rival them.

In addition, it was one thing if they simply vanished after use.

However, what if they fell into someone else's hands after vanishing? What if they fell into the hands of Nazarick's enemies?

Nazarick was protected by World-Class Items, so the interior should not be affected, but if things went poorly, the enemy might be able to lay siege to the entrance.

Therefore, he had to find some other way to save Shalltear, without using World-Class Items.

“Albedo, I am grateful for your words. I shall now tell you the reason why I was silent just now.”

His body still felt like the human it had once been. Ainz took a deep breath, like he had while he was alive, because he knew how important the words that came next would be.

“I intend to challenge Shalltear to a one-on-one battle. Therefore… I am unsure if I can return alive.”

“—I understand that we must do battle with Shalltear, because leaving her be is the worst possible option!”

Ainz nodded in his heart.

He did not know why the enemy had not given Shalltear any orders, but once they did, the situation would become dire, because everything about Nazarick might end up being exposed.

“Still, why must it be a one-on-one fight? Can we not win by numbers? Are we unable to help you?”

As he wiped away Albedo’s freshly-shed tears, Ainz answered:

“It is not that, Albedo. I trust you. It’s just that… well, there are three reasons. The first… is because I doubt my own suitability as your master.”

“How can you say that, Ainz-sama?!”

Ainz raised his hand to interrupt her.

“...Since I considered the possibility of players existing, I should have also thought of the existence of World-Class Items. Therefore, I wonder if such a slow-thinking person as myself has any value as a ruler, and if I am qualified to lead everyone.”

“Your presence alone is value enough, Ainz-sama! If there is any inadequacy, we will assist you with all our strength!”

“Thank you, but the person most responsible for this incident is myself.”

If this world truly possessed a [Longinus], then it was possible that all the Guardians might be eradicated for the price of a villager’s life. It was quite bad that Shalltear had been mind-controlled, but when one was aware of that aforementioned danger, they had gotten off remarkably lightly.

“And so you intend to atone for your sins by fighting Shalltear in single combat… but who could possibly punish you, Ainz-sama, the highest ruler of Nazarick?”

“That’s not all. This is the second reason… the fact that Shalltear is alone. It might well be a trap — indeed, it could be a fatal trap.”

As he saw the puzzled expression on Albedo’s face, Ainz continued speaking:

“We — Ainz Ooal Gown — often used PK methods similar to how Shalltear is now. We would use one of our members as bait and then hunt down any prey who got hooked. Of course, there was a high chance of the bait being killed, but in exchange, we would make sure any enemies who attacked were wiped out.”

“If that’s the case, Ainz-sama!”

“Wait a minute, I’m not finished. Do you know what we feared most whenever we set a trap like this?”

Without waiting for a reply, Ainz proceeded to answer his own question.

“That would be the number of attackers being less than the number of people used as bait. The less people we hooked, the more we had to worry about enemy ambushers turning the trap against us.”

After he saw the understanding dawn in Albedo’s bloodshot eyes, the unbreathing Ainz exhaled anyway.

“And the last reason is because Shalltear has to die.”

“In that case, let me go! I am the most suitable for the task, since I have a World-Class Item of my own.”

“... Are you sure you can win? Don’t lie to me — tell me your odds of victory.”

Albedo bit her lip under Ainz’s calm gaze.

“Albedo… you are right. Shalltear is very strong.”

Shalltear Bloodfallen.

She was the strongest Guardian of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. Not even Albedo — no, nobody among the other level 100 NPCs was capable of facing her.

“Because of that… I must be the one. I am the only one who can challenge Shalltear in a one-on-one fight and win.”

“Well, about that… perhaps you could defeat her in your full equipment, but…”

Ainz sported a full set of divine-class items and all sorts of cash items, while Shalltear only had a single divine-class item, her Spuit Lance. Ainz had a massive advantage in terms of equipment quality. However, what Albedo had left unsaid was the reason why Ainz’s chances of victory were slim.

Ainz was fully aware of that reason as well.

It was because Shalltear Bloodfallen was the nemesis of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Ainz roleplayed an undead magician, and his character build focused on necromancer-type classes.

In other words, his character had been built for entertainment.

Shalltear, on the other hand, had been made with an optimized build. In addition, Shalltear's divine magic caster classes could use many spells which were very effective on the undead, and she was adept at melee combat.

(TL Note: the JP term is "gachi build", where gachi refers to muscles or being powerful. The same term also comes up in the Overlord Prologue)

These two reasons were bad enough, and on top of that, the necromantic spells Ainz favored did not work well on Shalltear.

Ainz could not use his specialty against Shalltear, and Shalltear had an advantage when fighting the undead.

In addition, Ainz typically did not equip his best items because he feared that they would be stolen away. Thus, when they clashed, Ainz's chances would be very low. Worse, he might not have a chance at all.

"So you're saying that the circumstances don't favor me?"

Ainz had the right of it. Albedo lowered her head.

That might be the case, Ainz agreed. He should not be able to beat Shalltear.

Still—

*—You'll see that the title of Supreme Ruler of Nazarick which you call me is not for show.*

"—There is nothing wrong with your thinking, but it is in error. After all, you only possess the knowledge has been infused into you."

"Eh? What does that mean?"

"How experienced are you?"

"What? Experience?"

Albedo's face turned bright red in an instant.

"Yes, combat experience."

“Ah! So that’s what you meant! Yes, I can make full use of the strength which the Supreme Beings have given me. So I believe it counts as being very experienced.”

Ainz shook his head to reject Albedo’s answer. He had learned a lot when fighting that Clementine woman.

“That’s not right. Being able to wield power and gained experience are completely different things. Do you remember the large-scale invasion of Nazarick? Are you familiar with Shalltear’s memories of fighting players?”

“I did not ask in detail, but she said she vaguely remembered being killed once.”

“...Besides that?”

Albedo shook her head to indicate that she did not.

“...Typically, she and I were the ones who handled lone intruders… That stinginess helped quite a lot. That being the case, I should be the one who goes, since I have the highest chances of winning.”

Ainz smiled coldly. Naturally, his face did not move.

However, Albedo seemed to have felt the smile of her absolute ruler, and her cheeks turned pink, as though looking upon the man that she adored.

Ainz made his challenge to a person who was not here.

“When I was the guildmaster of Ainz Ooal Gown, my chances of victory in PVP combat were quite high… granted, I lost to people who had flawless builds, but how could I be defeated by someone who only relies on high stats? More importantly, I had a close friendship with Peroroncino. This is what they mean by “The battle’s over before it’s begun”... do you get it, Shalltear?”

“...Ainz-sama, I will no longer try to stop you. However, I want you to promise that you will return here safely.”

Ainz studied Albedo quietly, and then slowly nodded.

“I promise you that I will defeat Shalltear and return to this place.”

## Part 2

A vast, emerald-green world spread before him. Ainz looked around, and then chuckled at his post-teleport reflex to check if anyone was around. If there was anyone that Ainz needed to look out for, they would have attacked long ago, without giving him the chance to look around.

For security's sake, he had also chosen to teleport to a point over two kilometers away from Shalltear.

While he had already checked the surroundings with magic, there was no way to completely guarantee that the World-Class Item user who had mind-controlled Shalltear was not around. However, in the end all he could do was try not to worry unnecessarily. As Ainz rounded his shoulders in relief, he looked behind, to the two people that were following him.

"Let's split up here," he told Aura and Mare.
They were the only two people whom Ainz had permitted to walk with him before the impending battle.
He had already ordered those subordinates who had tasks outside back to Nazarick. Apart from Aura and Mare, only Sebas and Solution were still at large.

The main reason he had chosen them was to play on his enemies' emotional weakness. Unlike  Demiurge and Cocytus, who were heteromorphs, Aura and Mare were humanoids. Perhaps their foe would be unwilling to slay such adorable humanoid children.

Of course, perhaps the enemy might really be that ruthless. Even so, he wanted to have people around in case something happened.

*Although, it might not help at all.*

Ainz looked at the two mismatched gauntlets on Mare's hands. The right one was fashioned in the shape of an angel's sleek hand and glowed with silver light, but the left one resembled a demon's claw, covered in hooks and spikes. The crimson radiance of magma leaked through the fissures on its surface.

Then, he turned to Aura, and at the large scroll behind her.

"...If you are outnumbered, retreat to Nazarick immediately."

"...Understood."

Aura nodded, her face stiff. Mare rushed to lower his head as well.

"Listen well, you must retreat. This is also part of my plans. In addition, the items I have given you are the treasures of Nazarick. You cannot allow them to be taken, no matter what. In some ways, they can be considered more valuable than you are. Do you understand?" Ainz exhorted.

Ainz felt uneasy over Aura's somewhat reluctant response. If she disobeyed his orders due to her loyalty, it might lead to a fatal problem.

After hearing their replies — one energetic, one shy and retiring — a question arose in Ainz's heart.

*In truth, which do I value more?*

He did not want to use a World-Class Item to save Shalltear. From that point of view, one could say that he valued the items more.

However, the reason for not using the World-Class Items was the same as what he had told Albedo in the Treasury. They were aces in the hole, which could turn any defeat into a victory.

It was one thing if there was no other way to save Shalltear, but since there was still another possibility, it would be wiser not to use them yet.

Leaving these reasons aside, which was more important? The NPCs — who had been painstakingly crafted by his companions, and who were now sapient and loyal beings,  or the World-Class Items — which symbolized the adventures which had raised the standing of Ainz Ooal Gown within the game YGGDRASIL?

Though Ainz thought deeply about the matter, the fact that he could not reach an answer troubled him.

Perhaps he might have been able to conclusively state his answer before coming to this world, but now, he could not.

The results of his guildmates’ painstaking and intricate labors were these NPCs, who had the ability to think and feel.

*Because I’m planning to kill this… this NPC, who’s like a child. I’m planning to kill Peroroncino’s daughter.*

Frustration filled Ainz’s heart.

One could also call it a form of guilt.

However—

Ainz’s keen gaze zeroed in on Shalltear’s potential location.

“It’s the only way to break the control of a World-Class Item.”

He had spoken those words to convince himself.

After seeing the looks in Aura and Mare’s eyes, Ainz felt that it was not good to worry them further, and changed the subject.

“Then, work together with them. Keep an eye on the surroundings.”

Ainz pointed to the four huge clumps of meat that were leading the way for them.

They were two meters wide and their bodies were pink. However, these monsters had countless cloudy white eyes. It looked as though the eyes from all manner of corpses had been haphazardly stitched together.

These were undead beings made with the [Create High-Tier Undead] skill, Eyeball Corpses.

Ainz had used his entire day's worth of that skill's uses to make these Eyeball Corpses, because they were the nemesis of stealthy beings, whether they used magic or skills to do so.

Their cloudy eyes were not ornamental, but possessed outstanding perception. Even the specialized ranger Aura could not match them. Although their effective combat level was low, their emphasis was on detection ability and not fighting power, so his aim was to have them support Aura for targeting duties.

“Understood! However, will they obey my orders?”

“There will be no problems in that respect. I guarantee it. Also, you should link your minds with magic. That way, you can act as a command center and patrol the area in peace.”

“Okay! Although it would be faster for me to go myself, we don’t know where those guys are. Got it! Then, after Mare uses his stealth-enhancing magic, we’ll take these guys and lay low.”

“That sounds fine. I’ll leave that to you.”

Ainz quietly smiled — though it could not be seen, as his face could not move.

♦♦♦

The last person to enter the room was Demiurge, who threw himself down on an empty seat. It clearly illustrated his mood, given that he would never act so crudely under normal circumstances.

“Well, is there an explanation for this?”

Demiurge narrowed his eyes as he directed that intense question to Albedo, seated opposite him at the table.

“Why did you agree to this?”

His tone was even, but that was simply a thin veil draped over the surface. Everyone could feel the barbs in his words.

When a typically calm person displayed great emotion, the distance between his usual behavior and the abnormality made that emotion seem even more intense to others. However, this was not quite accurate, because Demiurge was very worked up, and none of his comrades had seen such agitation from him before.

However, in the face of this questioning, filled with hostility — or even killing intent — Albedo remained unmoved.

“This was Ainz-sama’s decision. How can we subordinates oppose —”

“—Why?”

The question interdicted Albedo’s reply with the finality of a guillotine’s blade.

“Why? When Ainz sama left for the human city (E-Rantel), you were the one who insisted on having a Guardian follow him. Why did you agree to this now? You should be worried about Ainz-sama’s safety now, as you were then.”

Albedo inclined her head in response, and Demiurge’s face visibly contorted.

“Then, I’ll ask you again! Why did you permit this?!”

His anger seemed to shake the room. This intensity was completely unlike the Demiurge whom they were familiar with.

Cocytus slowly turned his head, looking at the two people staring each other down. There was worry in his eyes.

“...Also, you should have known that Ainz-sama was lying, right?” Demiurge asked, his voice low and angry.

After Albedo nodded again, Cocytus exhaled sharply. Both of them knew that this clear, high-pitched sound was one which Cocytus made when he was confused.

“..Earlier. You. Said. That. Ainz-sama. Told. You. His. Reasons. For. Leaving. Alone. But. Do. You. Not. Find. It. Strange? From. Ainz-sama’s. Point. Of. View. A. Sequential. Attack. Would. Be. Safer. We. Could. Attack. In. Waves. And. Wear. Down. Shalltear’s. HP. And. MP.”

“...You’re right, Cocytus. There is no way Ainz-sama would not be able to think of a strategy that we could easily come up with. In other words, Ainz-sama was deliberately lying, to hide something else.”

“What. Reason. Is. That?”

“I have no idea… which is why I’m asking. Since you did not know the reason, why did you let Ainz-sama go alone?”

“It’s because Ainz-sama now is a completely different person from how he was several days ago.”

Demiurge opened his narrowed eyes slightly to show that he was confused by this, as though asking Albedo to continue her explanation.

“At that time, Ainz-sama did not seem like a man, but instead… how shall I put it… yes, this might sound disrespectful, but at that time, he looked just like a child who was trying to run away.”

“I did not feel that at all. Were you mistaken, perhaps?”

Demiurge shifted his gaze to the [Crystal Monitor] within the room. Its surface displayed the form of his master walking deeper into the forest.

“Really now? I don’t think I would be mistaken about the look on the face of the man I love…”

Albedo was looking at the Crystal Monitor as well, with the look of a lovestruck maiden on her face. However, that expression only angered the already frustrated Demiurge.

“Then, what! What about this expression?”

“Right now, Ainz-sama has a look of great conviction on his face. As a woman — perhaps it is disloyal to think in this way, but when I know that my beloved master intends to see through his conviction to the end, I will not say anything more. Also, Ainz-sama has promised me that he will return to this place once more.”

Once he saw that Albedo was not going to continue, the visibly displeased Demiurge cut loose:

“Naive. Irrational. You’re just making decisions based on your feelings. Ainz-sama is the final Supreme Being who remained here. Once we know his life is in danger, it is our duty to eliminate that danger. Even if we are rebuked for it, even if we should perish by doing so, we should still take action, should we not?”

There was a thumping sound as Demiurge sprang up.

“Where are you going?”

Demiurge’s voice was quite calm as he turned to leave.

“Need you ask? Obviously it is to send my minions—”

Demiurge sensed something running toward him and turned to look. He saw Cocytus, brandishing a divine-class weapon.

“...I see… So the reason you summoned me here and ordered me to this place was for this, was it not, Albedo?”

“Indeed, Demiurge. The 7th Floor is already locked down in the names of myself and Ainz-sama, and we have control of all the vassals. Need I tell you whose orders they will obey?”

“...Foolishness! How will you take responsibility if Ainz-sama perishes? Ainz-sama is the last remaining entity to whom we can pledge our loyalty!”

“Ainz-sama will return.”

“How can you be so sure of that?!”

Demiurge’s eyes went wide, but there were no eyeballs within his eyesockets. Instead, he had gemstones, which lacked pupils or sclera, but which were intricately cut with countless sparkling facets.

“Believe in your master. This is our purpose, as those who were created by them.”

Demiurge’s mouth had been opening and closing all this time, but now he firmly shut it.

This was because he felt — *she might be right.*

The NPCs of Nazarick were absolutely loyal to the 41 Supreme Beings, but the way in which they expressed their devotion varied from person to person. Thus, it was natural that Demiurge and Albedo might have different opinions on how to show their loyalty.

However, Albedo’s idea of loyalty rocked Demiurge to the core.

Even so, he was still worried, and because the uneasiness in his heart had not vanished, he had given voice to those words.

*If Ainz-sama vanishes like the other Supreme Beings, who shall we be loyal to?*

*We were created to be loyal to them, but once we lose that value, what reason is there for us to exist?*

As though to cover up his own emotions, Demiurge forcefully sat himself back on the chair, completely unlike how he usually was.

“If… If anything happens to Ainz-sama, you will resign your post of Guardian Overseer.”

“...Demiurge. You. Dare. Ask. Albedo. To. Resign. The. Position. Of. Guardian. Overseer. Which. The. Supreme. Beings. Gave. Her? This. Is. Treachery!”

Albedo’s response to the astonished Cocytus was a simple smile.

“That will be fine. However, Demiurge, if Ainz-sama returns safely, you will obediently yield to me if a similar situation occurs.”

“Of course.”

“Then, Cocytus, what do you think of Ainz-sama’s odds?”

Cocytus calmly informed the two of them of his opinion:

“Three. To. Seven. With. Ainz-sama. Being. Three.”

Demiurge’s shoulders quaked. He could not pretend he had not heard the inauspicious words which Cocytus, the mightiest warrior present, had just spoken. However, Albedo was different. As she heard that pronouncement, she continued smiling, her face brimming with supreme confidence.

“Is that so. Then, let us watch as Ainz-sama turns those odds into a victory."

♦♦♦

After parting ways with the two of them, Ainz trod a path toward Shalltear's location. The reason why he could discern the directions of north, south, east and west and head straight for Shalltear was thanks to his skills.

After passing through the trees, he saw Shalltear. She looked completely different from how she had before, like a doll, and it made Ainz feel sad. At the same time, he was angry at himself, but he was far angrier at the user of that World-Class Item.

"Dammit."

He did not curse loudly, but the intensity of those words implied an anger so powerful that even Ainz could not fully suppress it. This was despite being one of the undead, who were resistant to such surges of emotion.

"I decided to spread the name of Ainz Ooal Gown in order to find my friends. That was the method I selected. Thus, I took action in a low-key manner to avoid pointless conflicts. And yet, why did this happen?"

Who were they? Who did they belong to? What did they want? Why had they used a World-Class Item on Shalltear?

“...No matter who they are, once I learn about them from Shalltear… I’ll finish them off for sure.”

Ainz’s unmoving skull was seemingly twisted by the black, bubbling hatred and murderous intent within him.

“You will deeply regret your foolishness. If it is a fight with Ainz Ooal Gown you want, then a fight you shall have.”

After giving voice to the anger in his heart, Ainz’s frustration slowly ebbed away.

The true battle would begin now, and he had to calm down in order to face it.

“I’m such a fool. I know there’s better ways to do this.”

Ainz cracked a self-deprecating grin.

“...Is this guilt? Or is it because I didn’t dare face it… I just wanted to run away.”

Shalltear was the strongest of the Guardians, but she was not that much stronger. If the other Guardians attacked in waves, victory would be assured.

Yet, there was one reason why Ainz had not chosen that method—

—It was because he did not want to see his beloved children killing each other before his eyes.

If she had betrayed Ainz Ooal Gown of her own free will, Ainz would have taken that treachery in stride and destroyed her with everything at his disposal. If that was the NPC’s will, then as the ruler of Nazarick, he was obliged to deal with it sternly.

If she had betrayed him because she had been programmed to do so, he would find the best way to compromise with her.

However, Shalltear’s situation now was different from all those scenarios. She was under mind control, and the one at fault was Ainz, who had not anticipated such a situation. Thus, he was the only one responsible for this.

He wanted to finish it with his own hands.

Ainz removed one of his rings. It was a cash item that allowed for resurrection at hardly any cost. Removing this ring symbolized Ainz’s determination to throw his hat over the fence, because if he could return to life, he would subconsciously relax in his heart.

This was not giving up, but conviction. With that feeling in his heart, Ainz looked to the sky.

“The enemy hasn’t made a move yet. Up till now, the only thing I can sense are the divination spells from Nazarick… am I being watched?”

Normally, Ainz would have many defensive spells layered on himself. The anti-divination countermeasure he used in Carne Village was one of them.

In YGGDRASIL, friendly fire was disabled, so his friends could cast divinations on Ainz as normal. However, things were different in this world. If Albedo and the others wanted to observe Ainz, Ainz would automatically respond with a magical counterattack.

If that happened, the counterattack would clash with Nazarick’s defensive network. If he was not careful, Ainz might be hit by the network’s own counterattack and take unnecessary damage.

This was why Ainz had disabled the offensive spells linked into his countermeasures and only used the one which told him the origin of any divination spells. What he learned from them was that nobody was observing him other than Nazarick.

Ainz tilted his head, unable to make sense of things.

*Could it be that Shalltear was actually abandoned here by accident?*

"And… I wonder if Albedo saw through my lie? Good grief… Although, don't you think this feels like a wager, Shalltear?"

Of course, there was no reply from the blank-faced Shalltear.

Ainz looked to Shalltear. He ran a simulated battle through his head, and felt like fleeing.

While he had resolved himself just now, just standing here filled him with incredible mental stress.

Though he was prepared to sacrifice himself — no, it was precisely because he was prepared to die that the remnants of Suzuki Satoru — the weak-spirited human — was afraid.

What came next would be a battle to the death. This was not a fight in a game like YGGDRASIL — this was a true deathmatch.

This was unlike his battles with Nigun and Clementine after he had come to this world, where he had "fought" (more like trampled) people that he vastly overpowered. This time, the outcome was in doubt, and he was starting from incredibly unfavourable conditions.

If he were not undead, and—

“If I were not the leader of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick and the representative of the guild, I might not even be able to clench my fists.”

Ainz chuckled to himself, as though to exorcise all his negative emotions.

The fear of death had vanished, and he was no longer uncertain over the possibility of being defeated.

The proud memories of his glorious past gave Ainz strength.

“I am Ainz Ooal Gown. How could this name ever be defeated?”

He was the owner of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick. He would prove that his title was not for show.

Ainz’s eyes were keen as they studied the defenseless Shalltear.

“...Then… let’s start!”

Ainz shouted as he cast his spell. He carefully selected a spell from his massive repertoire of magic — and activated a 10th-tier spell.

“[Body of Effulgent Beryl]!”

Ainz’s skeletal body glowed green, and then—

“Hahaha!”

—He laughed, his eyes never leaving Shalltear as he cast his spell. He laughed because of this unexpected outcome, and also because he had won a big bet.

“Exactly as I had expected. As long as they don’t consider my actions to be a clear sign of hostility, the NPCs won’t even enter combat status! It’s just like how it was in the game!”

These actions were identical to those of mind-controlled monsters in YGGDRASIL. The fact that the game’s logic could be used here slightly improved the massive disadvantage he faced.

“That being the case, I’m sorry about this, Shalltear, but I’ll have to ask you to stay that way before the battle starts.”

Ainz continued casting various spells.

"—[Fly], [Bless of Magic Caster], [Infinity Wall], [Magic Ward - Holy], [Life Essence], [Greater Full Potential], [Freedom], [False Data - Life], [See Through], [Paranormal Intuition], [Greater Resistance], [Mantle of Chaos], [Indomitability], [Sensor Boost], [Greater Luck], [Magic Boost], [Draconic Power], [Greater Hardening], [Heavenly Aura], [Absorption], [Penetrate Up], [Greater Magic Shield], [Mana Essence], [Triplet Maximize Magic Explode Mine], [Triplet Magic Greater Magic Seal], [Triplet Maximize Boosted Magic Arrow]—"

This seemingly endless stream of spells surrounded Ainz's body.

"Then, here I come!"

Those words, spoken after he had finished his preparations, were directed at Shalltear and himself.

The first thing Ainz did was to use one of the ultimate moves of magic, those spells which surpassed the 10th tier of magic.

These spells were known as super-tier magic—

♦♦♦

From the perspective of the tiers of magic, spells of this level could be considered spells, and not spells at the same time. To begin with, they did not consume MP, but instead they could only be used a limited number of times per day.

When one first learned them, they could only be used once per day. Every 10 levels after level 70, however, one could use them an additional time per day.

One could learn a single super-tier spell per level.

Rather than call them magic, they might be better described as skills.

In other words, the average player could only use four super-tier spells per day at level 100. One might ask at this point — why not consecutively cast super-tier spells to defeat Shalltear? Indeed, the destructive power of super-tier magic was unrivalled, dwarfing even that of 10th-tier spells. If one could cast super-tier spells one after the other, even the damage alone would only be survivable by a vanishingly small fraction of level 100 players. Shalltear was not among that number, so that would definitely defeat her.

However, he could not do that.

The reason was because super-tier magic could not be consecutively cast.

To begin with, each super-tier spell needed a certain amount of casting time. Cash items could remove that casting time, but another penalty prevented the repeated casting of super-tier spells.

Once any member of a team cast a super-tier spell, every member would be penalized by being unable to cast such spells for a certain period of time — in other words, a cooldown period.

This restriction was put in place to prevent guild wars from being decided by who could vomit out the most super-tier spells. In addition, this cooldown period could not be eliminated by any skill or cash item.

Thus, when PVPing, the party which cast a super-tier spell first was often considered an idiot.

After all, defeat was likely when one expended one's trump card without properly understanding one's foe. The fact was that there were very few PVP battles where the victors were the first to cast super-tier spells.

♦♦♦

Yet, Ainz's first move was to cast such a spell.

There was no frustration or confusion on his face. A calm, steady light glowed within his eye sockets.

A gigantic dome-shaped magic circle appeared around Ainz, extending about 10 meters away from him.

The magic circle shone a brilliant white, and translucent diagrams of characters and symbols appeared. These images changed ceaselessly, with kaleidoscopic speed, differing from second to second.

Ainz could have used a cash item to instantly cast the super-tier spell, but he did not do so. Instead, his eyes moved from Shalltear to his surroundings.

“No ambushers…? Or are they watching from afar? This should be the best time to attack, right?”

Magic casters who were preparing a super-tier spell suffered from lowered defenses. In addition, the super-tier spell would self-terminate if the caster took a certain amount of damage.

Thus, the basics of casting super-tier spells included protecting the caster with several friends. In other words, now was the best time to attack Ainz, who was alone.

However, there was no change in his surroundings.

“Was I being paranoid?”

Ainz laughed, and then shrugged.

It was just a hunch, but Ainz was quite sure that Shalltear had not been staked out as bait, but simply abandoned here.

“What is all this, anyway? Ah, I don’t have the eyes of god, so I can’t see through everything. If I did, perhaps things might not have ended up like this.”

Ainz rotated his shoulders in an exaggerated way as he muttered to himself.

He could not move around freely while casting a super-tier spell. All he could do was stand there like a dummy and wait for time to pass.

In order to effectively make use of his time, Ainz pulled out a thin strip of curved metal from his pocket dimension. When he placed it on his wrist, the strip curled and fastened itself to him. There was a row of characters on the metal strip, which changed as every second passed.

Needless to say, it was a watch.

Ainz placed his fingertip on the metal strip, touching the displayed characters.

“The timer’s set, Momonga-oniichan!”

An incredibly fake, cutesy and high-pitched girl’s voice echoed through the surroundings, and it was hard to resist the urge to knit his brows.

“...Why can’t I turn off the voice on this watch…”

Ainz grumbled, but he did not actually mean it. He could easily mute it with the use of creator tools, but Ainz had not done so.

The person who had lent her voice to this watch was Bukubukuchagama, the guild member who had made Aura and Mare.

If he turned off her voice, it would be the same as an ordinary watch.

The reason why such a mainstream voice actress like herself would affect such a vexing tone was clearly because she wanted to tease Ainz.

Shalltear Bloodfallen’s creator Peroroncino was her brother. He got along very well with Ainz. Thus, Bukubukuchagama treated Ainz as her brother’s friend, resulting in this.

However, it might not have been a prank.

She frequently voiced loli characters in eroges, and the voices of those characters sounded like that strange voice from just now. Therefore, she might have just been using her working voice.

When Peroroncino realised his sister was voice-acting for a H-game he wanted to buy, his interest in it plummeted. Ainz smiled bitterly as he recalled his comrade's complaining.

“...Well, it's true, if I heard Bukubukuchagama's voice while surfing the net, I'd be shocked too.”

As Ainz expressed his thoughts to his absent friend, he continued pulling out several wooden sticks from his pocket dimension. They were about 15 centimeters long and flattened out, and each of them was inscribed with characters which read, [Tsukiyomi], [Hou Yi's Bow], [Earth Recover], [Iron Fist of the Schoolmarm] and so on.

There were several slots for scrolls on his belt. He quietly inserted the sticks into these slots, memorizing their position as he did so.

These preparations took time, and when they were complete, the blue light of the magic circle intensified, indicating that the super-tier spell was ready to be cast.

“Then, let's go.”

Having steeled his heart, a look of conviction filled Ainz’s eyes.

“Super-tier spell - [Fallen Down]!”

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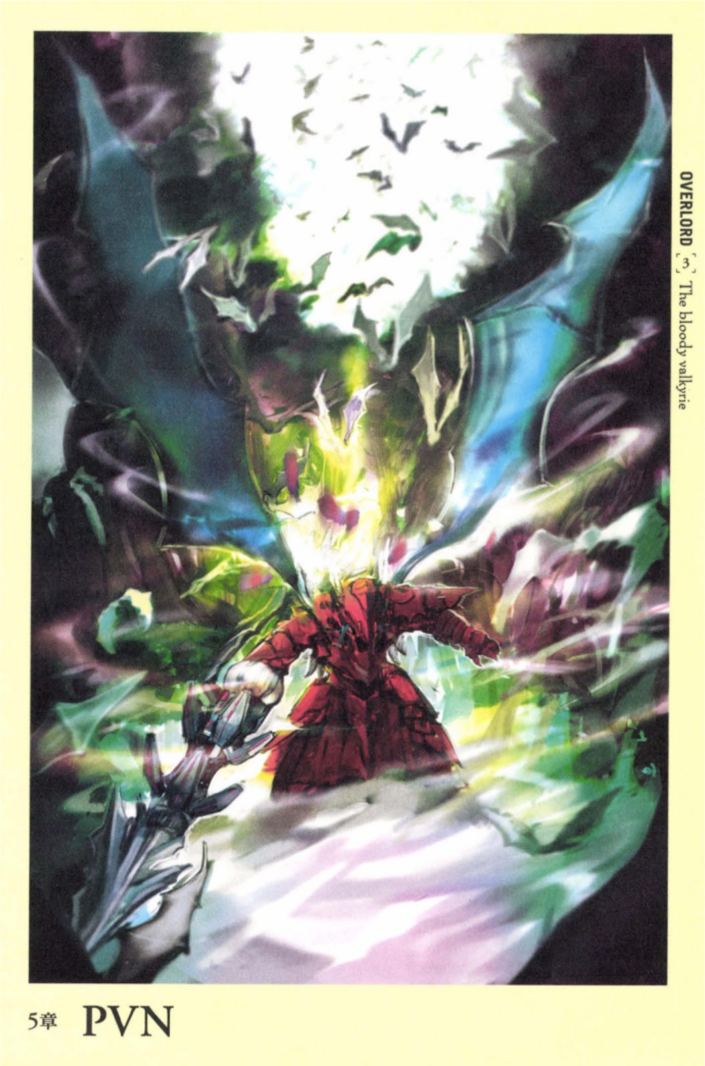
# Overlord Volume 3 Chapter 5

## Volume 3 – The Bloody Valkyrie

## Chapter 5 – PVN

### PVN


OVERLORD [3] The bloody valkyrie
5章 PVN

*Translator: Nigel*
*Editor/Proofreader: JcqC*

## Part 1

—There was the sound of sizzling, as though someone had thrown a burning torch into water.

The spell which surpassed the very definition of tiers went off — it looked as though the sun had risen on the land, dying everything in his field of view a brilliant white.

The exothermic conflagration generated a rapidly-expanding wave of heat, which greedily consumed everything within its radius.

This hell of a vision lasted only five seconds, but it felt dozens of times longer than that.

Eventually, the brilliant white world disappeared. In the wake of the vanishing pulse of superhot energy was a large circular area — vastly different from before.

Nothing outside the area of effect was affected. The trees were still trees, the earth was as full of vitality as the forest, and the forest itself was untouched — an extremely normal world.

In contrast, the area within the circular area was charred black, converted into a dead zone of jaw-dropping proportions.

The awe-inspiring temperatures had consumed all the vegetation in the area, leaving only a few carbonized tree stumps. There were several vitrified areas on the ground which were still emitting smoke.

Standing beyond the bounds of that world which permitted no survivors, Ainz felt a dreadful presence washing out from within.

It came from the only person who remained within that area.

Nothing living could have survived that fatal heat.

“Kakahaaah~ Kahaaaah~”

That strange sound, accompanied by what seemed to be a gnashing of teeth, filtered into Ainz's ears.

He turned to look at its source, and saw a point of red amidst a world scorched black.

He saw Shalltear with wisps of smoke trailing off her body, and a look on her face which seemed to say, "not enough gun". Her crimson pupils, filled with hostility and bloodlust, focused on Ainz's body.

"Ainz-samaaaa! That really hurt!"

Shalltear slowly walked forward, her footfalls fracturing the charred ground underneath.

Step by step, she shrank the distance between Ainz and herself, the Spuit Lance in her hand cutting through the air with a *whoosh* which indicated that she was still able to fight.

Arcane magic casters could only show their true ability at long range. Ainz had no frontliners to cover for him, so there was no advantage in allowing his foe to draw near to him. Yet, Ainz did not scramble back. In a tone which called to mind an image of a champion welcoming a challenger, Ainz arrogantly taunted Shalltear:

"That was just a meaningless present. Did you like it, Shalltear?"

"Ahahahaha!"

Shalltear laughed, and her mirth came from the bottom of her heart.

"Wonderful! To think I have to kill you, the all-powerful Ainz-sama!"

"-Sama, you say. Why do you address me as -sama? Who is your master?”

“What a strange question. Is it not natural to address a Supreme Being like yourself with -sama? As for my present master…”

Shalltear’s face scrunched up, as though confused.

“...Why *do* I have to fight you, Ainz-sama? ...Ah, is it because you attacked me? But why would you attack me, Ainz-sama… I need to destroy anyone who attacks me with all my strength? Why is that?”

Before long, Shalltear seemed to have come to a conclusion, and her smile from earlier returned to her face.

“Well, I’m still not too sure why, but since you attacked me, I must destroy you, Ainz-sama!”

“...Is that so… I understand. I understand what kind of state you’re in...”

“Oho, what’s wrong, Ainz-sama? You look a little weak there. How can you beat me like that?”

“Hmph, aren’t you getting something wrong? Do you think someone like *you* can defeat *me* — defeat Ainz Ooal Gown? The name of ‘Ainz Ooal Gown’ is invincible. Shalltear, you will kneel in submission before me.”

“Ahahahaha! Ooooh, how scary~”

Moving with a speed which put gales to shame, Shalltear charged, wreathed in bloodlust. The scorched ground exploded beneath her feet with every step she took. Clementine’s assaults were swift, but Shalltear’s speed was in a class of her own.

For an instant, Ainz was grateful that he did not need to blink, because Shalltear was fast enough that he would lose track of her if he took his eyes off her for a moment.

Trailing laughter behind her, Shalltear continued her charge, aiming the tip of her lance at Ainz and thrusting forward. The lance charge was originally a technique used by mounted knights and made with the speed and weight of their mounts behind it. However, Shalltear's strike — made with her extraordinary strength and her awesome speed — easily surpassed that attack.

The word "one-shot kill" could not even begin to describe that assuredly fatal blow, and it tore through the air towards Ainz.

However, despite the ever-approaching tip of the lance, Ainz remained unmoved.

In a gentle voice, he said:

"It's dangerous, you know."

The tender warning he gave Shalltear, as though concerned for her well-being, referred to the countermeasure he had prepared for Shalltear's attack.

As Shalltear attacked, the [Triplet Maximize Magic - Exploding Mine] spell which he had cast beforehand automatically triggered.

The three explosions blew Shalltear's body away.

As Ainz saw this,he apologized in an even more compassionate tone:

"Shalltear, please forgive my late warning. Actually, there were mines there… [Maximize Magic - Gravity Maelstrom]."

She was still flying back from the force of the explosion when Ainz hurled a black sphere after her. It was a spinning vortex of hyper-intensified gravity that could significantly damage a target, even one of Shalltear's level.

At this moment, Shalltear stood back up from her downed state and held out an empty hand.

"[Wall of Stone]."

A vast wall of stone emerged from the ground, completely enveloping Shalltear. The gravity maelstrom Ainz had thrown collided with the wall, causing it to bend, twist and crumble, but the gravity maelstrom vanished as well.

"Hmph! [Maximize Magic - Hold of Rib]!"

As Ainz followed up with another spell, massive ribs erupted from the earth and closed in on Shalltear like a bear trap. The sharp points of white bone bit deeply into Shalltear's body.

"Kah!"

Normally, this spell would have continued holding its target after damaging them, but Shalltear easily shrugged free. This was because she was immune to movement restrictions, resulting in the failure of the attempted restraint.

"...Shalltear, I forgot to tell you, but I've already set mines around this area. How about attacking me from the air instead?"

"—Ainz-sama, I won't take the bait. You've put traps in the air too, haven't you?"

"Was that so obvious?"

"Yes, I saw through it long ago."

She chuckled, and the red flames in Ainz's eyes dimmed.

There was nothing of the sort. The mines Ainz had laid just now were the only set. Neither had he set traps in the air. This battle was not an easy one where he could waste MP on ineffective spells.

Therefore, he had used the mines as a bluff to hamper Shalltear's mobility. He had narrowed his eyes after she had stepped into it. However, now was not the time to relax.

Ainz was the challenger in this battle. He was walking a very fine tightrope, and he would fall if he was not careful. Ainz knew this, and he was not stupid enough to become complacent over a small victory like that.

"Still, that's Ainz-sama for you. A simple charge like that couldn't close the gap between us."

There was genuine admiration in Shalltear's eyes and her voice. At the same time, Ainz could sense the fighting spirit she radiated from her entire body.

*The real show's about to start*.

If Ainz's body could produce sweat, his back would probably be a flowing river by now.

*In any case, I need to keep doing damage until my MP runs out.*

If he could not do that, then Ainz would be set on the road to defeat.

◆◆◆

Shalltear braced the Spuit Lance, narrowing her eyes at the magic caster before her — at her master, Ainz Ooal Gown.

She had no idea why she had to oppose her beloved master, but her mind told her that it was not an important question. All she had to do was kill him and then ponder the matter at length afterwards.

As she calmly considered this, Shalltear smiled she noted how favorable the current situation — against a lone undead being — was for her.

Magic casters — particularly arcane magic casters — were incredibly powerful, but that power derived from their MP. Once their MP ran out, they would naturally lose their fighting ability. On the other hand, Shalltear might have been a divine magic caster, but she was also adept at melee combat. Even if her MP ran out, she could keep fighting as long as she had HP.

Therefore, even if she could not deplete her foe's HP to zero, she could still win as long as her enemy expended all his MP. This was especially true for an arcane magic caster like Ainz, who had no means of recovering his health.

*So, please tremble in fear at your dwindling HP and MP. Ahaha, my heart pounds so hard whenever I think of Ainz-sama's terrified face!*

Then, what was the best way for her to fight? It would have to be a drawn-out battle.

Shalltear gripped her divine-class Spuit Lance as she hastily threw a battle plan together.

That weapon's special ability was to recover the wielder's health in proportion to how much damage it did to an opponent. No, one could say that this divine-class item was designed around that special property. This was why Ainz, the eternal backliner, had not summoned any minions to be his vanguard. He was very aware that summoning weak monsters to tank for him would only serve to recover her HP.

*Ah~ Poor Ainz-sama. He can't summon frontliners and has to fight all by himself~*

Shalltear cast [Mana Essence] as a sadistic grin formed on her face.

That spell permitted her to perceive her opponent's mana for a while, and so Ainz's remaining mana appeared before her.

*That's a lot of mana… how did he amass that much?*

Ainz had about one and a half times the MP (mana) of Shalltear. There was probably nobody else in Nazarick who had a mana capacity like that.

*He truly is a Supreme Being. One could call him an extraordinary undead… a super undead… no, a godly undead.*

That said, she still did not think that she would lose. Perhaps it might be different from the other Guardians, but to Shalltear, Ainz and his enhanced necromantic attack spells were hardly a challenge for her.

*Of course, I mustn't be careless. That said, why isn't Ainz-sama wearing his divine-class equipment?*

The robe Ainz wore now seemed very plain to her. It lacked the dignity of his usual black robe.

*Could it be that he wore it to deal with me? It's very likely, but there's no point just staring each other down. Nothing will happen. So let's restore some health first in preparation for a drawn-out battle...*

"[Regenerate]."

The spell Shalltear had just cast could even recover the health of the undead. Currently, it was restoring the health lost from the super-tier attack spell. At this moment, Ainz launched another attack, throwing out a gravity sphere like just now.

“[Maximize Magic - Gravity Maelstrom].”

The black orb approached at great speed. She considered casting the [Wall of Stone] from before, but that would not put any pressure on her opponent. She would have to make the first move if she wanted to greatly decrease her foe’s mana.

Shalltear selected—

“—[Greater Teleportation].”

The plan was to teleport into close range and begin melee combat.

Her field of vision distorted, but the scenery that should have instantly appeared before her eyes felt like it had been slowed down.

*Cheh!*

Shalltear guessed that this was the effect of the teleport-impeding spell, [Delay Teleportation].”

As Shalltear had guessed, she was quite a distance away from Ainz, when she should have been deposited into the range of her Spuit Lance. Instead, she saw three sparkling balls of light before her eyes — made by the [Drifting Master Mine] spell.

Shalltear sensed the mines and assumed her mist form to evade them as they flew toward her. This skill transmuted the body into mist, and it was quite a flavourful skill for vampires. However, it did not transform the body into the physical phenomenon called mist, but instead phased the body into the astral plane. Thus she could use it to completely avoid attacks in the physical world — the three explosions which resulted.

“Naive!”

After Ainz’s shout, he followed up with a [Maximize Magic - Astral Smite].”

That spell could strike astral entities, and it found its mark on Shalltear’s body, whose defense had been somewhat reduced after taking mist form.

Wracked by agony, Shalltear terminated her mist form. She felt her lip split, and something soft and slippery escaped from within.

“Truly marvellous, as expected of you, Ainz-sama!”

Ainz did not respond to that honest praise. He merely studied his opponent with doubtful eyes.

“You can’t believe me, right? But I do feel you are someone worthy of my loyalty.”

He was very good at spell combat, after all.

Still — Shalltear’s lips could not help but curl up in a smile. This was because Ainz’s MP had diminished greatly.

Shalltear’s health had decreased somewhat, but that amount of damage was well within limits. In contrast, Ainz’s mana had gone much further down than anticipated, so it was well worth the loss. In other words, Shalltear was one step closer to victory.

*Then, how about this one?*

Shalltear made her move.

“[Force Sanctuary].”

White radiance filled the area around Shalltear, a defensive barrier made of pure mana. While this barrier impeded the caster’s attacks, it would also completely negate her opponent's’ attacks.

Through this barrier of light, she saw Ainz scrambling to cast a spell.

“That’s right. If you don’t cast a spell soon, it will go very badly for you.”

Shalltear already knew why Ainz seemed to have the upper hand in this battle.

Was it because of his abilities — no.

Was it because of his equipment — no.

Was it because of his preparations — yes.

Indeed, these favorable circumstances were due to Ainz’s extensive preparations and many spells which he had cast beforehand. The power of magic casters varied greatly with their preparations for any given situation, and the same applied to Shalltear. Therefore, Ainz should have been trying to break Shalltear’s defenses before she could buff herself up.

Shalltear was poor at defensive spells, and she had no intention of casting them. Her aim was purely to drain Ainz’s mana. She smiled to Ainz as he frantically cast his spell.

*My my, everything’s going according to plan, Ainz-sama. Still, you’re not even using scrolls, staves or wands; are you trying to preserve your strength? Are you too panicked? Or did you know they weren’t effective against me?*

Ainz’s magic resistance completely negated the effects of low to mid-tier spells, regardless of how powerful their casters were. In contrast, Shalltear’s magic resistance was affected by her opponent’s stats and levels. Even a 10th-tier spell by a weak magic caster would not be able to breach her resistance, but against a powerful magic caster — like Ainz — 1st-tier spells were the limit.

Some scrolls were affected by their creators’ skills, but for the most part, they were made at the minimum possible level that allowed for their creation, which also meant that they were fixed at the lowest possible caster level. Thus, there was a high chance that scrolls would not be able to breach Shalltear’s defenses. Was that why Ainz had not done it?

As Shalltear analyzed the combat conditions, Ainz continued casting a spell.

“[Maximize Magic - Thousand Bone Lance]!”

Countless — well over one or two thousand — lances of bone erupted from the earth around Ainz. The ivory spears assailed the defensive barrier from all directions. Soon, she heard the sound of what seemed like glass cracking, and Shalltear’s protective barrier shattered with it. Scattered chips of bone flew in all directions, melting away into nothingness.

“Cheh!”

She had not expected this magic barrier — upon which she had spent a significant amount of mana — to be broken in one move. Shalltear was unable to believe this as the attack on her continued.

“It’s not over yet! [Maximize Magic - Thousand Bone Lance]!”

“—[Greater Teleportation].”

Her teleport destination was an open space in the air, outside of the [Delay Teleportation] spell's area of effect.

"Don't think you can get away — [Maximize Magic - Gravity Maelstrom]."

Shalltear had expected Ainz to follow up with some kind of attack against her. His spell came flying over, as though aimed at the place Shalltear would appear after teleporting.

She seemed calm and collected as always, but Shalltear was quite fascinated by Ainz's incredible prowess. These masterful abilities could only have been honed through long experience.

"You seem to be taking this quite easy."

Shalltear's opponent — she was not quite sure why she had to kill him — asked:

"Why is it that you are so at ease while fighting me? We are on the same level, but my gear is stronger than yours. Granted, my specialty cannot be brought to bear — which is to my disadvantage — but that is all. Still, I can sense the confidence from you, your belief that you have the advantage and that victory is assured."

A sense of superiority filled Shalltear.

"Ahahaha, then I shall show you the one of the reasons why I can take it so easy. Did you know I had a skill like this?"

With a smile of victory, Shalltear evoked an Impure Shockwave Shield. A wave of force — colored reddish-black like clotted blood — spread forth, disintegrating the gravity orb upon contact.

This was one of Shalltear's skills, which combined offense and defense.

“Cheh!”

Ainz clicked his tongue at this. Shalltear had done so earlier because things had not gone as planned, but for Ainz, it was because he could no longer relax around her.

“Aha!”

Shalltear laughed at Ainz’s expression, and then she showed off another special skill of hers.

A gigantic divine lance appeared in her hand. It was well over three meters long with an especially large head. The aura of purity it emanated proved that this was no ordinary weapon. It reflected the rays of the sun in its silver radiance, producing a beautiful and eyecatching display.

“Oh… I’ve never seen that before. Did you summon it with a skill or something?”

“Ahahaha, we’ll see how long you can act tough, Ainz-sama. Since you don’t seem to know this weapon, allow me to introduce it to you. Its name is the Purifying Javelin!”

Shalltear released the platinum lance as she laughed at Ainz’s ignorance. She did not throw it like a javelin, but instead it rose by itself and darted out. This was a weapon which was guaranteed to hit if she spent additional MP—

“Guwaargh!”

—And hit it did, piercing Ainz’s chest. In Shalltear’s eyes, that unmoving skull seemed to twist in pain.

“Ahahaha! That’s a holy-element weapon for you; it seems like it was quite effective!”

Shalltear summoned the gigantic lance to her hand again, and cast it forth once more. The lance travelled at unavoidable speed, this time piercing Ainz’s shoulder.

“Kuh! Don’t look down on me! [Maximize Magic - Reality Slash]!”

Ainz cast a powerful spell.

When one reached the highest level of the strongest warrior class, World Champion, one would learn the supreme, ultimate skill called [World Break]. This 10th-tier spell was merely an inferior copy of that skill, but it was still among the most damaging spells in the game.

It cleaved through the very fabric of space, and fresh blood fountained from Shalltear’s chest.

A hit from this powerful attack spell could disregard virtually any form of magical defense, but the damage dealt converted back into health and flowed back into her body, as though time itself had reversed to render the attack completely ineffective.

Ainz howled at this:

“What did you just do?!”

“There’s no need to get worked up, Ainz-sama. That was a skill too,” Shalltear answered as she gloated over him.

“Cheh! In other words, my skills won’t work and you can do as you please, huh?!”

“Please don’t think this is unfair. This was an ability which Peroroncino-sama bestowed upon me. In other words, that great being is superior to you, am I wrong, Ainz-sama?”

"—That felt like it came from the heart."

That emotionless tone — or perhaps it was so calm that one could not pick out any emotions from it — filled Shalltear with doubt. However, before it could settle in, Ainz shouted again:

"Here I come, Shalltear! I'll show you that no matter what skills you have, none of them can hold a candle to my magic!"

"Aha! You want a showdown of firepower then, Ainz-sama? Don't think I'll lose to you!"

A [Maximize Magic - Reality Slash] spell crossed paths with a Purifying Javelin, each tearing into the bodies of their targets.

As the two of them traded attacks again, Shalltear laughed at Ainz's foolishness in her heart. At the same time, she was confused — *why am I fighting Ainz-sama?*

Shalltear Bloodfallen was a Floor Guardian of Nazarick, set over the 1st to 3rd Floors. At the same time, she was a loyal subordinate made by the Supreme Being Peroroncino. That being the case, was it not bizarre that she would be fighting Ainz Ooal Gown, who was formerly known as Momonga? Why was she doing battle with Ainz-sama, who was another member of the 41 Supreme Beings?

If her creator had so ordered, she would obey and fight with all her strength. Even if all of Nazarick were her enemies, she would charge at them without a moment's hesitation. Yet, this was not the case.

She thought and she thought and she thought, but she could not find an answer.

Still, she could not stop herself. It was as though someone was whispering into her ear, *“Shalltear, you have to kill the enemy with everything you have.”*

Shalltear inspected Ainz’s MP consumption with [Mana Essence], and then she fought to suppress the laughter rising in her heart. At the same time, she reversed time to recover her health.

More powerful spells consumed more mana. [Reality Slash] was one of those spells, and it was quite inefficient, in terms of damage caused for mana expended. Even so, Ainz was still using it. Shalltear thought that perhaps Ainz was hoping to deplete her health and claim victory before the battle became a brawl.

*That’s right, finishing it quickly is the right thing to do, because drawn-out battles are to my advantage… Perhaps it’s also because Ainz-sama knows that debuff spells have little effect on the undead.*

Shalltear narrowed her eyes and focused on Ainz, who was still casting big spells.

*Very well, then I shall adapt to whatever he comes up with.*

Shalltear’s skills were divided into the at-will and limited use types. Turning back time to recover damage could only be done three times a day. The Purifying Lance was also only usable three times a day, while the Impure Shockwave Shield could only be used one more time today.

Still, there was no point in being miserly about them. Shalltear’s plan was to end the battle in a melee fight. Her MP and skills were essentially tools to deplete Ainz’s MP.

*I can fight without MP, but Ainz-sama is finished without MP.*

Shalltear could fight with the total of her HP and MP, but Ainz could only use his MP. This was the great disparity between them.

She looked on Ainz — who was limited to his spells — with a gentle expression in her eyes. One could call them the eyes of a mother looking upon her child… or rather, the look of pity which the mighty would bestow upon the weak.

After throwing her final Purifying Javelin, Shalltear accepted the [Reality Slash] counterattack, and decided to move into the second phase of the battle.

“How about this, then? [Summon Monster 10th].”

“As if I’d let you! [Greater Rejection]!”

The summoned monsters were dispelled in an instant, and Ainz’s smug laughter reached her ears.

“I won’t let you draw out the fight, Shalltear.”

*I can’t smile yet, though I was just trying to use up my MP after expending all my special abilities.*

Shalltear faked a stern expression, and then cast another spell.

“Really now? Then how about a direct attack? [Maximize Magic - Vermilion Nova]!”

“[Triplet Maximize Magic - Call Greater Thunder].”

The crimson blaze — one of Ainz’s weaknesses — engulfed him, while three gigantic strokes of lightning earthed themselves through Shalltear’s body.

This was the first time in this battle that she had felt her health drop like a rock, which put a look of displeasure on Shalltear’s face.

*Did he make preparations to resist fire?*

No matter how powerful one was, one could not prepare to resist all elemental attacks. There was still a limit, even if a heteromorphic character combined their racial resistances with job classes that granted resistances and outfitted themselves from head to toe in resistance-granting divine-class gear. However, by focusing on specific resistances, a character could make themselves immune to elements to which they should have been weak.

In other words, Ainz had forsaken his other resistances and focused on raising his fire resistance.

*This might be troublesome. I have no idea which elemental resistances Ainz-sama gave up.*

The only way to discern Ainz's elemental weaknesses was to use [Life Essence] to check his HP and barrage him with attacks of multiple elements, then see which one hurt him the most.

*I'm not going to do something tedious like that. I'll target an element which he should be weak against.*

"—[Maximize Magic - Brilliant Radiance]."

"—[Maximize Magic - True Dark]."

Holy-element light wrapped Ainz, purifying his body, while Shalltear's body was corroded by non-elemental darkness.

In this moment — Shalltear did not miss the fact that Ainz had flinched.

Although he was trying to cover it up by changing his stance, there was no way he could cover up the fact that he was trying to remain stoic in the face of pain.

Shalltear smiled inwardly, because she had found his weakness.

No, she could not blame him for that. After all, most undead were highly vulnerable to holy-element attacks. It was very difficult to remove that weakness, and if he had geared himself to resist the fire element, there was no way for him to do so.

The two of them locked eyes, and Shalltear cast her next spell.

Naturally, the spell Shalltear had chosen was still [Brilliant Radiance]

They exchanged magic in this back-and-forth fashion for some time. Even Shalltear had lost a sizeable amount of health. In fact, her HP (health) might well be zero had she not secretly used MP on skills which defended against spells.

*That's Ainz-sama for you… he's far superior to me in spell battle, be it in attack or defense. I used several holy-element spells in a row, but Ainz-sama took a lot less HP damage than me. Still, I also made him burn a lot of MP too.*

From what she could see, Ainz's MP was greatly reduced from how it had been when they had first started out. Even so, she could see Ainz's fighting spirit burning in his eyes.

*It's getting hard to take, I want to break Ainz-sama's magnificent will and turn him into a beaten dog.*

Shalltear forced herself to ignore the sensations welling up from her lower belly. If she were in her room, she would have called a Vampire Bride over, but she was on the battlefield, much to her regret. And of course, she could not comfort herself on the spot to slake her desires.

That being the case — she would satisfy herself through combat.

Shalltear looked at Ainz with lust-moistened eyes, and she licked her lips. If she continued lengthening the distance between them, what sort of face would he make for her?

“Then, time to recover. [Maximize Magic - Greater Lethal].”

Positive energy restored the health of the living, while negative energy would damage them. However, the opposite was true for the undead. Thus, [Greater Lethal], which channelled vast quantities of negative energy, was the most powerful healing spell that Shalltear (one of the undead) could cast.

“I see. It would seem I’ve lost quite some health as well — [Greater Lethal].”

Shalltear blinked several times, unable to believe what was happening before her eyes. However, she had to accept the fact that Ainz’s wounds were recovering before her eyes, even if she could not quite believe it.

“...Eh? Why is it that you can cast the divine spell [Greater Lethal]? Was it on your class’ spell list?”

“No, sadly, this is not an innate ability, but an effect from a magic item. This magic item only allows me to use a single specific spell, and requires me to use an equipment slot, nor can that spell be enhanced with skills. It is also much weaker than someone casting the spell off their own list, so you could say it has many drawbacks.”

As Ainz complained, he used [Greater Lethal] again, causing Shalltear in turn to mumble, “that’s a spanner in the works, isn’t it?” Still, her aim was to deplete her foe’s MP, so the plan was not yet ruined.

With that in mind, Shalltear continued casting [Greater Lethal] to recover her health. Since Shalltear was a level 100 character, it took a while for her to fully recover.

At the end, she cast—

“[Maximize Magic - Greater Lethal].”

“[Body of Effulgent Beryl].”

—After healing his wounds, Ainz cast a defensive spell on himself.

Shalltear was a divine magic caster, and she had not received much knowledge from Peroroncino. Thus, she did not know what the [Body of Effulgent Beryl] spell did. However, the green radiance that surrounded Ainz appeared once more, so Shalltear concluded that it must be some kind of defensive magic.

*That seems about right. I’ll launch a direct attack next.*

Shalltear brandished her Spuit Lance, but just as she was about to move, the words which had slipped from Ainz’s mouth entered her ears.

“What a disadvantageous fight.”

Shalltear had not expected this, and she loosened her grip on the Spuit Lance. She was about to say, “Did you only realise that now?”

Well, she wanted to say that, but Shalltear concluded that it would be disrespectful to mock Ainz, her master, so she did not speak those words.

*...My master? Ainz-sama?*

That word kept appearing in her mind, and it confused her. Why was she baring steel at her master, Ainz-sama? Still, this was quite normal. There were many things in the world which were difficult to understand, and this was simply one of them.

Having made that decision, she sensed that Ainz’s actions lacked consistency. Thus, in a casual tone which did not belong on the battlefield, she asked:

“If you feel it is disadvantageous, why not retreat?”

“Mm, well, you do have a point…”

Ainz’s skeletal face could not show any expressions, but for some reason, she had the feeling that he was smiling bitterly at her.

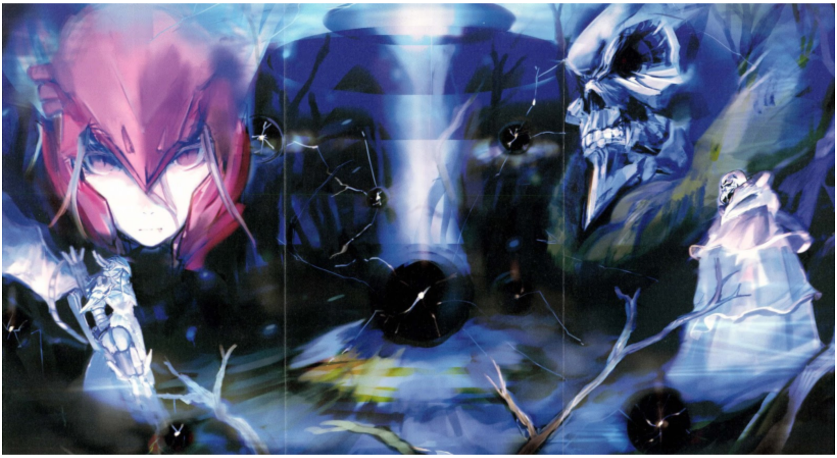
“I… yes, that’s right. I’m very stubborn, Shalltear. I don’t want to run from this.”

Ainz looked at one of his empty, skeletal hands. Shalltear’s eyes went to that hand as well.

“Perhaps others will not understand why I have done this. Some might even think of me as a fool. Still, right now, I am enjoying my position as guildmaster, because... I… Well, I might have been guildmaster, but all I did was mainly coordinate events or other sundry tasks. I hardly led from the front. Still, I am now standing on the frontlines for the sake of the guild… Perhaps it was simply to satisfy myself.”

“Is that so? Is that what they call a man’s imperative?”

“Yes… Is it? It might be… Well, to some extent, I might have resigned myself to my fate. It seems we were almost interrupted by this pointless conversation. My apologies, let’s start again.”



## Part 2

Ainz calmly studied Shalltear, who was bracing her Spuit Lance. He had to triumph in this melee if he was to attain victory.

The back of her armor bulged out, and a pair of bat wings burst forth, as though going straight through the plates. Ainz knew what would happen next.

Several giant bats flapped out from behind her to the sky. These were Elder Vampire Bats summoned through her Household Summons skill. In addition, she continued summoning Vampire Bat Swarms.

They were not strong monsters, but he could not let them do as they pleased. Ainz cast a spell:

“[Sharks Cyclone].”

A tornado, 100 meters high and 50 meters across appeared before him. The black funnel cloud engulfed the bats before they could flee, trapping them within the vortex.

Fast-swimming shapes could be seen within the rapidly-spinning tornado. These creatures were six-meter long sharks, and they moved as though they were in the ocean. The desperately fleeing bats were like bait which had been dropped into the water, and the sharks sprang on them. This spell showed its true potency against flying creatures, and the proof of that was adequately shown as the sharks ripped the Elder Vampire Bats limb from limb in an instant.

Just as the Vampire Bats were vanishing after being torn apart — a shadow broke free of the tornado.

It was a crimson shadow, bursting out of the tornado at top speed. The lance it thrust before itself left an afterimage in the onlookers’ eyes, like the fiery plume of a rocket.

Ainz could not react in time, and his body was wracked with pain. It felt as though his bones were crumbling.

In the instant in which Ainz had failed to pay attention, Shalltear had appeared in front of him. Her cruel weapon pierced through Ainz's chest and protruded out his back.

“Guwaaaargh!”

The weapon which had struck him also did bludgeoning damage, and the massive drop in health which resulted drew a cry of agony from Ainz.

Any pain which the undead Ainz felt would cut out once its intensity exceeded a certain threshold, much like his emotions did. This was why even Suzuki Satoru, who lacked combat experience, could endure this pain and calmly deal with it.

That said, this was no ordinary pain.

Ainz's — no, Suzuki Satoru's — mind was assaulted by the fact that his life was ebbing away. His vision grew dim and he felt himself losing consciousness, as though he had lost a great deal of blood.

However, Ainz's will was stronger than that weak mind.

This was because the person fighting here was not Suzuki Satoru, but the supreme ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown.

Shalltear did not cease her attack, even as Ainz considered what steps to take next.

Having impaled him with the tip of her lance, she continued driving it forward, ramming the point straight into Ainz’s body and forcing the thicker part of the lance behind it into him. He felt his body tearing apart, as well as a burst of intense pain, accompanied by the sensation of his health depleting further.

Thus, Ainz decided to activate the [Body of Effulgent Beryl].

The green light which enfolded him shattered.

The 10th-tier spell [Body of Effulgent Beryl] reduced the effectiveness of bludgeoning attacks against its subject while it was in effect, and it could completely negate one instance of bludgeoning damage after it was cast.

The [Body of Effulgent Beryl] absorbed the damage dealt by the lance, and so it seemed as though time had turned itself backward, the lance’s tip retreating back outside Ainz’s body.

Ainz moved back to where he had been standing before the lance had impaled him. As Shalltear watched him in bafflement, Ainz cast another spell.

“[Wall of Skeleton]!”

A wall composed of numberless armed skeletons erupted between the two of them. The skeletons in the wall attacked Shalltear, chopping, stabbing and slashing at her.

However, none of them managed to hit Shalltear’s body.

“[Maximize Magic - Force Explosion].”

An invisible shockwave exploded from Shalltear. The wall of skeletons buckled under the invisible impact, and then completely disintegrated.

The pulverized chunks of bone pattered like rain as they fell. Still, it had bought some time for Ainz, so it had been worthwhile.

“Release!”

In accordance with Ainz’s command, the  [Triplet Magic Greater Magic Seal] triggered three magic circles, each of which released 30 streaks of light, for a total of 90. These white bolts of light were non-elemental [Magic Arrows]. The dazzling afterimage left behind as they travelled through the air were like the spread wings of an angel — an angel of death.

1st-tier spells could not breach Shalltear’s magic defenses, but Ainz had cast that spell anyway. Sensing something odd, Shalltear desperately tried to evade them, but the ivory bolts of light turned a full 90 degrees in mid-air and chased her down, falling on her like hail.

The 90 magical bolts scored hit after hit on Shalltear, rapidly dropping her health.

The reason why they could pierce Shalltear’s defense was because Ainz had used a skill to temporarily boost the magic arrows to the equivalent of 10th-tier spells.

Ainz was not finished yet.

“Dance! [Triplet Magic - Obsidian Sword].”

Three longswords appeared in mid-air, their black bodies gleaming. They streaked after Shalltear, as though they had a mind of their own.

“Out of my way!” Shalltear shouted as she batted them aside with her Spuit Lance. However, the obsidian swords continued attacking her even after they were deflected. These weapons, created as they were through magic, were very difficult to destroy through physical means.

“[Magic Destruction].”

Shalltear used her scant few remaining MP to cast a spell which dispelled other magic.

Two obsidian swords vanished from that spell, cast with no regard to her remaining MP. However, one had not vanished, and it continued attacking Shalltear. The success rate of [Magic Destruction] was directly dependent on the spellcasting ability of its caster, and this was conclusive evidence of which magic caster was superior.

“Ahhh, how annoying!”

Shalltear paid no heed to the longsword attacking her and pressed onward to Ainz. Damage like that was barely a scratch to Shalltear.

The Spuit Lance sent Ainz flying to the side. With no way to resist bludgeoning damage now, Ainz could not ignore this damage. He stabilized himself in mid-air with [Fly], and then—

“Dammit!”

—This was the first time Ainz had cursed in panic during this battle.

Ainz had enough health to weather an attack like that, but the problem was right before his eyes. This was because the health lost by Ainz had been used to restore Shalltear's own health.

Her recovery rate was enough to surpass the damage done by the obsidian sword, so in order to cut down her rate of healing, Ainz cast an attack spell.

“[Triplet Maximize Magic - Reality Slash].”

The three dimension-rending slashes drew gouts of fresh blood from Shalltear, but she paid it no heed and continued pressing forward, the implacable obsidian sword at her back.

*Shalltear's depleted of MP, so all she can do is advance and fight within the effective range of the Spuit Lance… is that it? But that's the kind of fighting I hate most...*

Ainz retreated with a [Fly] spell, and continued attacking.

“[Triplet Maximize Magic - Reality Slash].”

Even as he kept backpedaling, the distance between them shrank with each passing moment. This was the difference between the speed of a [Fly] spell and a fly speed which had been augmented by skills.

Shalltear pulled herself before him, spurting blood as she did. Then, she suddenly curled herself up. The air distorted — and a massive shockwave erupted from Shalltear's body.

*That isn't a [Force Explosion]! That's an Impure Shockwave Shield!*

The shockwave generated by the skill shattered the obsidian sword and smashed into Ainz, sending him flying into the distance.

"Guwaaargh!"

Perhaps the Impure Shockwave Shield had been enhanced by another skill, but Ainz ended up tumbling several times along the ground. By the grace of his [Fly] spell and the magic items on him, he managed to force himself back upright.

Perhaps it was because he lacked semicircular canals or because of his undead traits, but Ainz was not dizzied by the rolling, and made to open the distance between himself and Shalltear.

This was a fortunate consequence. Ainz did not want to be locked in melee, and he now had a chance to cast other spells.

Just as he was about to do so, Ainz saw a ball of white light coalesce in front of Shalltear, which slowly shaped itself into a humanoid form.

Ainz was very aware of what that was.

His unmoving face grew stiff, and in contrast, Shalltear grinned like she had scored an overwhelming victory.

"It's here… It's finally here, huh? I knew she'd use this sooner or later, but to think Shalltear would use [Einherjar] — her trump card

— at this critical moment…”

The white light fully resolved itself into the shape of a person.

If one ignored the bleached-white armor and the glowing skin, it was the spitting image of Shalltear.

Ainz understood that the resemblance was not merely cosmetic.

While it lacked Shalltear’s spellcasting ability and several skills, and had no magic items, its weapons, armor and stats were otherwise identical to Shalltear’s. It was not undead, but a golem-like Construct. The two creature types had nearly identical resistances and immunities.

In other words, there was another Shalltear, who could only fight in melee combat.

Ainz had anticipated this would happen, but facing two level 100 opponents at the same time was still quite taxing.

In addition, Shalltear had summoned countless minions, like wolves, bats, rats, and the like—

These summoned minions were not as powerful as the Einherjar, but he could not discount their power in a group.

*I could wipe them all out with an area-effect spell… but what should I do about the Einherjar?*

Just as Ainz was thinking about his next move, the Einherjar charged, and that surprised him.

Why was Shalltear not moving? Did she not intend to gang up on him?

Ainz learned the answer to those questions after shifting his line of sight. At the same time, the points of light in his eyes blazed up.

“Now that’s just unfair!” Ainz cursed. To think she would actually do something like that.

What Ainz saw was the sight of Shalltear’s summoned minions disappearing one after the other, their bodies pierced by the Spuit Lance.

Shalltear was killing her summoned minions with the Spuit Lance to restore her health.

It went without saying that the amount of health restored by the Spuit Lance depended on the amount of damage it inflicted. When she attacked Ainz — who was of equal level and had a high defense — and her weak summons, it was immediately obvious which would give her more health in return. Indeed, Ainz could see Shalltear’s health refilling rapidly.

The summoned minions steadily died and vanished.

This was an unexpectedly cruel fact.

Since friendly fire was in effect, this too should have been an expected outcome.

Ainz regained his calm, and altered his battle plans to take this unexpected development into account.

However, Ainz could not completely calm himself after witnessing someone killing their own summoned monsters to restore health, a sight which could not take place in YGGDRASIL. As a result, the charging Einherjar landed a solid hit on him.

“Guwaaargh!”

The expressionless Einherjar continued attacking, the blows knocking Ainz back.

Forced back by the continuous string of attacks, Ainz decided to use his own trump card.

Shalltear’s summons were not unlimited, so they should be almost used up by now. Still, it would be bad to let Shalltear heal herself by using the surrounding monsters.

The original plan was to use the trump card once the Einherjar appeared. That plan did not account for Shalltear healing herself by killing her summoned minions.

♦♦♦

Ainz had 60 levels of job classes, and one of them was quite special.

It was a class that was very rare even in YGGDRASIL, held only by a small number of players.

Ainz could enter this class because he was not fixated on pure power, but had instead focused on roleplaying a necromancer to the hilt. Had he pursued character power, he would not have discovered this class — which required a very unorthodox build — by chance.

This was because the class' entry requirements were five levels of Overlord, a focus on necromancer-type job classes, as well as an overall character level of 95.

In normal games, most people would spread the news of a newly-discovered class on walkthrough sites to share with others. However, games like YGGDRASIL put a very high premium on information. For instance, few people would share news about a World-Class Item with others without charge. This was especially true for classes with trump cards.

The class in question was called “Eclipse”.

The class description stated: “Only an Overlord who is truly dedicated to the pursuit of Death may enter this class, which swallows up all life like an eclipse.”

The move Ainz was planning to use was one which was only available after reaching the maximum level (5th) in Eclipse, a skill which could only be used once every 100 hours.

It was the trump card of the Eclipse class.

That skill was called [The Goal Of All Life Is Death].

In that moment, a clock face appeared behind Ainz, its hands indicating 12:00. Then, he cast a spell:

“[Widen Magic - Cry of the Banshee].”

A woman’s wail echoed through the air. This cry carried with it an instant-death effect.

Ainz had used various skills to augment this spell, so its potency was greater than normal and harder to resist. Still, it was useless against Shalltear and the Einherjar construct.

Oddly enough, Shalltear’s summoned minions — who had no resistance to instant death — did not fall.

This situation was quite bizarre, but Ainz remained unmoved. Rather, one could say that things were going as planned.

*Tick.*

The clock face behind Ainz ticked, and its hands slowly moved as the spell took effect.

Ainz glanced at Shalltear in the distance as his health dwindled under the onslaught of the Einherjar, and at the same time he felt quite disappointed.

*...So I can’t finish this cleanly, huh? Damn you, Peroroncino, did you build her specifically to counter me? To think you actually gave her a resurrection item! Dammit!*

Ainz cursed his guildmate within his heart.

Ainz frantically struggled to avoid the attacks of the Einherjar. After 12 seconds had passed, the hour hand had completed a full circuit, and it pointed to the heavens once more.

Then, Ainz’s trump card took effect.

In that moment — the world died.

This was not metaphorical.

Everything died.

The Einherjar evaporated into white mist as it couched its lance, and dispersed before Ainz’s eyes. Even a homunculus with no concept of life died instantly. Shalltear’s familiars shared the same fate, unable to resist the destruction which overtook them.

That was not all.

Even the air — which was not even alive to begin with — fell into death. For over 100 meters in all directions, the air was no longer breathable. If any living creature tried to respire within that area, their lungs would be corrupted by the deadly air, and they would die.

Neither did the land escape the embrace of death. The terrain in a 100 meter radius was instantly transmuted into sand.

Only Shalltear and Ainz could move in this world, where only death remained.

Ainz’s trump card, [The Goal Of All Life Is Death] strengthened the effect of instant death magic and skills. Thus augmented, those instant-death effects could bypass any immunities or resistance and kill their targets after a certain amount of time had passed.

One could resist it by using a resurrection effect on themselves within 12 seconds, as Shalltear had.

The air and the land had also died because of that effect.

In YGGDRASIL, the environment would not have succumbed, but in this new world, the effects were quite appropriate to the skill. All things were equal in the face of Death.

Ainz himself was taken aback by this strange effect. The land had not died like this in YGGDRASIL. He could not help but shake his head after witnessing the effects of the game's powers in the real world.

However, Ainz swallowed back his surprise. The pride in his heart would not permit him to show any sign of shock. Instead, he acted as though this had been part of his plan. Carrying himself with the arrogance that befitted a ruler, he gently asked the sole survivor:

"What do you think, after experiencing the power that can slay even the unliving?"

The wind blew, dispersing the dead air between them. That wind carried his words to her.

"Incredible, I would expect nothing less of you, Ainz-sama. My household summons are dead to the last. However, your MP is almost depleted, while my health… is still at maximum."

In Shalltear's eyes, Ainz's MP was nearly zero. It was not completely gone, but he would probably only be able to use two or three more spells. With his MP so low, there was no way he could finish off Shalltear, no matter what spells he used.

Not even that super-tier spell which could grievously damage the undead — [Fallen Down] — could do so.

“I believe you only have two more 10th-tier spells in you? You had too much mana, so I can’t really judge how many more spells you can cast.”

“That’s correct. I should only be able to cast about two more spells, I believe?”

That was not a lie.

She had won.

Shalltear quirked up the corner of her mouth in a knowing smile.

There was no longer any doubt that Shalltear Bloodfallen was the victor and Ainz Ooal Gown was the defeated.

Shalltear patronizingly congratulated the loser, who had struggled so bravely until now.

“Truly magnificent. I had to deplete my MP and use up all my skills in order to drain your MP to that level, Ainz-sama. You are to be praised for lasting this long.”

Shalltear tightened her grip on the Spuit Lance. Now, all that was left was to deliver the fatal blow in melee combat.

“You are correct. Thus, I shall humbly accept your praise.”

Shalltear’s forehead twitched.

She was very annoyed.

She was very annoyed at Ainz Ooal Gown’s nonchalance. However, in the end Shalltear managed to swallow her rising uneasiness.

No matter how she pondered the situation, Shalltear could not think of how Ainz could turn the situation around. He had already used his ace in the hole. Thus, that was probably not composure, but the resignation of a death row convict, who had already foreseen his fate.

Shalltear slowly closed the distance between them. Even if her enemy tried to cast a spell from a scroll, Shalltear was confident of being able to strike faster than him. Thus, there was no need to be hasty.

Ainz did not flee, but merely stood proud where he was. She could sense his determination from his stance, and so Shalltear asked:

“Any last words?’

“Well, hm… Since you felt that I was a disadvantage, that without my MP I would be nothing more than a mook… You came at me with everything you had. For that, I must thank you, Shalltear. If you had fought more carefully, things would not have gone so smoothly.”

“...Wha?”

Shalltear doubted her ears. It would seem she had heard some nonsense.

Ignoring Shalltear's confusion, Ainz continued evenly:

"The most crucial thing in PVP is to deceive one's enemy. For instance, pretending that you're vulnerable to holy-elemental attacks when you're largely immune to them after swapping out your gear. On the other hand, there's the fact that you're still weak against fire-elemental attacks. However… I seem to have miscalculated. I used [False Data: Life] because I thought you would use [Life Essence]. It would seem that was a waste. If there is a next time, do remember to check your opponent's health. That's the difference between the theory and practice of tactics."

This was not what Shalltear wanted to hear.

Shalltear could not understand the meaning of those words. No, she did not want to understand them.

He did not want to admit his defeat — no, she could feel his strong will. More than that, he sounded like victory was at hand for him.

Shalltear continued closing the distance, but the thoughts welling up inside her checked her step.

*...Why isn't Ainz-sama backing off? As an arcane magic caster, he can't possibly beat me at this range. This must be a bluff!*

"My friend Peroroncino told me a great many things when he was making you. After I came to this world, I took the liberty of memorizing everyone's information. However, aside from my black history (Pandora's Actor), you are probably the NPC in Nazarick with whom I am the most familiar."

"Didn't you say… you didn't know my skills…"

Ainz smiled.

"I was lying, of course. Wasn't that obvious? I thought that perhaps if I said so, you would take the bait. That's because it would be quite hard to win if you saved your Impure Shockwave Shield to the last."

The flow of blood meant nothing to the undead, but Shalltear could feel hers draining from her face. In exchange, a wave of agitation spread through her entire body.

That was not a lie.

Nothing he was saying here was a lie.

Ainz Ooal Gown was standing before her without running away because he was confident of attaining victory.

"Ahhhhhhh!"

Shalltear's lips parted and she wailed, the better to vent the emotions welling up inside her breast.

Shalltear was the lion, Ainz was the rabbit, she should have been the hunter — no, that was wrong.

This should have been a battle between lions; it was just that Shalltear had treated him as a rabbit—

The anxious and uneasy Shalltear clutched at her Spuit Lance, intending to finish this battle right away, intending to kill her foe with strike after strike, even if he fought back —

An instant before that, the spell Ainz cast went off, and he reached into his robe.

A clear, crisp sound rang forth.

Shalltear could not help but doubt her eyes.

This was impossible.

The Spuit Lance had bounced off some kind of white metal.

If it had been deflected by magic, Shalltear would have pressed the attack, because she knew Ainz did not have much MP left. That would simply have been his death throes. However, Shalltear froze as she beheld the scene before her.

That pure white radiance was not the work of magic.

—It was from a suit of armor.

It was a set of pure white armor, with a huge sapphire set into the breastplate, which radiate a pure, holy light.

That suit of armor was on Ainz’s body, and it had repelled the thrust of the Spuit Lance.

From his superior height, Ainz looked toward Shalltear.

No… he was probably looking down on Shalltear.

She was angry, of course, but Shalltear did not have the energy to spare on that, because a cold voice spoke to her:

“From the start, I too was planning to end this battle in melee.”

◆◆◆

There was a loud *bang* as a hand struck the magnificent table, which shuddered from the blow it had taken.

The Guardians here had been watching the battle intently.

They had struck the table several times, but this was the first time that particular person had done so.

“Impossible! That. Armor. Belongs. To. That. Supreme. Being!”

“...Touch Me-sama, is it?”

Albedo squinted at the crystal monitor as she breathed the name of that Supreme Being.

“Correct! That. Is. Touch Me-sama’s. Armor!”

Cocytus seemed very excited — no, in truth, he *was* very excited — as he exclaimed.

The pure white armor which Ainz wore belonged to one of the nine people in YGGDRASIL who possessed the class of World Champion.

Only the winner of the developer-sanctioned tournament could possess the class of World Champion, and the company awarded a special piece of equipment to the champion as a prize.

Touch Me had chosen that suit of white armor. This specially-made armor complemented his status as a World Champion, and its abilities exceeded those of divine-class items, putting it on par with Guild Weapons. Of course, since it was a gift to the champion, only the World Champion could equip it. However—

“By using the warrior transformation spell — [Perfect Warrior]... it would seem… he is no longer bound by any job-related penalties, and can make use of warrior equipment.”

Demiurge’s tone was filled with respect, and Albedo murmured in awe.

“To think his plans had been laid out that far in advance…”

Albedo broke out in goosebumps, and she hugged herself.

By turning into a warrior via magic, one could equip several items that would normally only be usable through specific job classes. This was a method the developers had implemented to allow players without specific classes to make use of items such as shurikens, vajras, kasa, and other bizarre pieces of equipment. However, it would seem that spell’s remit also extended to those prize items issued by the developers to World Champions.

“Astounding…To. Think. He. Actually. Thought. That. Far. Ahead... I. Am. In. Awe.”

Though the battle had not yet been decided, the Guardians present were filled with incomparable reverence for Ainz's cunning and wealth of experience, which had allowed him to weave such an intricate plan and guide it to fruition.

And as the Guardians watched the crystal monitor, their delight and awe growing within them, the sound of the table thumping could be heard again.

"That. Is!"

Again, Cocytus raised his voice.

## Part 3

—The sound of clashing metal rang forth.

“Gyaaaaah—!”

An unbelievable sight unfolded before Shalltear’s eyes. The edge of the blade cleaved into Shalltear’s chest from her shoulder, until it reached her unbeating heart.

Shalltear’s crimson armor was dyed an even deeper shade of red. She scrambled back, looking at Ainz in shock.

Ainz held a katana. It was a massive nodachi, wreathed in electrical discharges. That sword had cut through Shalltear’s armor as though slicing through paper.

Her armor was a legendary-class item. Only a rare few divine-class weapons could go through it with such ease.

Then — there was only one answer.

Yes.

Ainz was holding one of those few weapons—

Shalltear screamed the name of that blade as she coughed up blood.

“Takemikazuchi Mk 8!”

Shalltear leaped back, avoiding the strike from the nodachi. The fact that she had jumped so far beyond the nodachi’s striking range was a sign of how frightened she was of that sword.

However, nobody would mock Shalltear for doing, even less so if they were denizens of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick.

Rather, they would have a look of understanding on their faces, because they all feared this weapon of the Supreme Being.

They feared the sight of this sword, named after and wielded by Warrior Takemikazuchi, one of the 41 Supreme Beings.

“Did I not say so, Shalltear? Ainz Ooal Gown is invincible.”

Ainz stepped forward, and Shalltear immediately took two steps back.

“Shalltear, you should know this. Ainz Ooal Gown is the combined power of 41 people. You had no hope of victory from the start,” Ainz calmly said.

His words rang with absolute confidence and the utmost assurance.

The dangerous battle of earlier had been like treading on thin ice, where one false step might send him to the bottom of the lake. But now, Ainz had brought the battle to his enemy.

Currently, their MP was 0, but Shalltear’s HP was higher.

However, after using [Perfect Warrior] to become a level 100 warrior, Ainz’s stats far outstripped Shalltear, who was not a pure warrior. In addition, Ainz’s equipment was superior to hers.

That meant — the unfavorable battle from earlier was a thing of the past.

The man who had turned the tables advanced with even, steady steps.

“—Shalltear Bloodfallen, open your eyes and witness the might of the ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, the one who gathered the Supreme Beings, and the man which you praise with your very own mouths.”

Those words were the signal for the attack.

Ainz stepped forward and delivered an overhand strike with the nodachi.

Shalltear leapt away, preparing to jump forward as she did. Her aim was to counterattack Ainz in the opening after he made his move. Sure enough, it was hard to be overly precise with the nodachi Takemikazuchi Type 8, much like it was with the Spuit Lance.

The lightning-swathed Takemikazuchi Mk 8 rent the air as it swung down — and then the tip of the blade halted in front of Shalltear, who was preparing to jump, before thrusting forward at incredible speeds.

No matter how strong one was, it was very difficult to stop a full-strength blow in the middle of a swing. This was especially true when one used a large and heavy weapon.

Yet, Ainz could do it. This was because he had not used all his force to attack. In other words, he knew that the strike would have been avoided, so he had deliberately feinted an opening.

The continuation of that attack had also been planned out, down to which strike he would use to follow up. It was an instinctive, natural movement for a warrior.

Ainz simply provided the bodily strength to turn it into reality.

However, he probably would not have considered these matters had he not experienced combat in E-Rantel. He would probably have unleashed one massive earth-shattering strike after the other, and taken Shalltear's counterattacks.

Even after becoming a level 100 warrior, he would not have been able to fully utilize a warrior's abilities, and they would have ended up wasted. Much like driving a car, one might have a license, but there was a world of difference between someone who only had a license on paper and one who was used to driving on the open roads. Both of them could operate a car, but their reactions to sudden changes in circumstances would be drastically different.

In other words — experience.

During this battle with Shalltear, Ainz felt that this experience was his most potent weapon.

♦♦♦

*It'll be hard to avoid it.*

That was what Shalltear calmly thought as she saw the tip of the sword coming at her, as fast as lightning. However, thrusts were a risky move. One could use the weaknesses of thrusting attacks to turn a dangerous situation into an opportunity.

*Then… it can't be helped.*

Shalltear put her hand into the path of the thrust, having decided to sacrifice her left arm.

As the blade pierced her palm, Shalltear twisted her left hand, successfully diverting the thrust to one side.

It did not penetrate her chest, but the tip of the sword still drove through her left palm, into the muscle and bone, until it was deeply buried in her left arm. In addition, the electricity surrounding the nodachi coursed through Shalltear’s body.

Though she was undead, the sensation of being savagely penetrated still filled Shalltear with something resembling terror, though she kept the corners of her mouth raised.

It was a smile — not one which an injured person would make, but neither was it a brave front. After all, that was what Shalltear had intended.

Shalltear tensed her left arm. The nodachi halted, pinned down by her muscles.

Thrusts were maneuvers that might end up leaving one’s weapon stuck in a foe’s flesh should they miss their mark. Hence, they were not very practical in combat. In other words, they had a weakness. Shalltear knew that weakness, which was why she had sacrificed her left arm to force an opening in her opponent’s defense.

She could not have done so if she could not grasp the nodachi in her left hand in the instant before it impaled her — a feat which she had to perform within tenths of a second.

“You’re open now!”

Now that his nodachi was tied up, Ainz had no way of defending against the Spuit Lance.

As Shalltear thrust the Spuit Lance at lightning speed, she once more beheld a startling sight.

Ainz let go of the divine-class weapon in his hand — a magic item of the highest order — and then withdrew one of the several wooden sticks slotted at his waist.

“Hah?! Are you retarded?! How could a little stick like that block the Spuit Lance?! And then you actually let go of your divine-class weapon?! Isn’t that a colossal mistake?!”

Granted, not remaining attached to Warrior Takemikazuchi’s divine-class weapon was a wise decision, but there was no way he could win after losing that weapon.

With a mocking smile on her face, Shalltear vowed to make Ainz suffer more than her left hand had. She thrust the Spuit Lance with all her might — and then it was deflected, with a clear, crisp sound of metal against metal.

“Eh?” Shalltear exclaimed in surprise.

The wooden stick was no longer in Ainz’s hand, and in its place were two kodachis, which had deflected the Spuit Lance. One was as blindingly brilliant as the sun, while the other glowed with the pure, gentle light of the moon.

Ainz’s hand — which were holding the kodachis — began smoking. It would seem that those weapons were the bane of the undead.

"You were saying something about being open, Shalltear?"

"Cheh! What, what's going on?"

Shalltear could not feel the weight of the weapon which had pierced her left arm. It had vanished, as though it could not exist in the same world as the new weapons which Ainz had prepared. Shalltear sensed that they had returned to their original place.

"Well, that's true. If you can't handle a weapon in each hand, sticking to one would be wiser…"

Ainz's mumblings seemed to have been directed at someone elsewhere.

"Then, is that the case for me now?"

Shalltear could not understand what he meant by those words, and after losing her balance, the moonlit kodachi swung at her.

The attack at her neck was a feint; the kodachi nimbly altered its course and streaked at her shoulder. It was only by the barest of margins that the Spuit Lance managed to deflect it.

Ainz took the opportunity to close the gap with Shalltear. Since his foe was using a massive weapon, drawing nearer would make it harder for his opponent to make her move.  This was the thinking of a grizzled veteran — one who was intimately familiar with that idea.

Then, the other kodachi — the sunlit one — sliced into the gap in the Spuit Lance's defense and lightly pierced Shalltear's body.

“Aaaaaahhh!”

She wailed in pain.

Actually being stabbed did not hurt that much. The problem was the agony which came from the holy-element energy which filled her body like poison. That pain was much harder to bear.

Ainz moved the kodachi from side to side while it was still within her, as though to saw open the wound.

“Get away from me!”

The distance between Shalltear and Ainz was too narrow to use the Spuit Lance, so she kicked at him. He blocked it with a kodachi, but he could not fully resist the kick and was flung back. At this moment, Shalltear saw that Ainz’s hands had released the kodachis, and they had another small stick in them.

Then, as the stick fragmented, a huge, savage-looking gauntlet covered Ainz’s hand. That gauntlet was so big that it nearly dragged on the ground from a standing position—

“Take this!”

—And as Ainz shouted, he punched her.

Shalltear reflexively raised the Spuit Lance to defend herself, but the massive impact travelled through the Spuit Lance and washed over her entire body.

“Gugyaaah!”

Shalltear yelped pathetically as she was flung backward, as though struck by a gigantic fist. The hit did not do much damage, and the Spuit Lance could block physical attacks, but the knockback effect was enough to overcome the magic items protecting her.

She recovered her lost balance quickly thanks to her magic items, but a fire still burned inside her head.

“How, how dare you force such a pitiful sound out of me! I’ll make sure you squeal like that before I tear you apart… huh?”

Her eyes shifted, and as she saw a massive globe of light, Shalltear’s agitation vanished.

That flare of sunlight came from the bow Ainz had drawn. Its arrow of light were naturally targeted at Shalltear.

“No, no way, how could that be… Hou Yi’s Bow?”

This weapon had been named after the hero who had shot down the sun while China was still a balkanized mass of smaller countries. It was also the main weapon of the Supreme Being who had created Shalltear.

All the Guardians were protected against ranged weapons, so they did not have to worry about simple projectiles. However, those arrows of light did not do physical damage, but elemental damage. In other words, they were counted as magic attacks, and those defenses did not apply.

*Dammit! I’m out of MP! If I had some, I could defend myself with a spell! I’m out of skills too! If I had known, I should have saved a few uses for… no!*

The fact that she had used up all her MP and her skill uses were all the result of their previous battle. In other words, she had followed Ainz Ooal Gown’s script to the letter.

Shalltear’s eyes turned bloodshot and she bellowed. This was the expression of one who had realized their mistake after the fact, and who was determined not to admit defeat.

“Damn you! How did you obtain Peroroncino-sama’s weapon? Was all this part of your plan? How did you prepare all these weapons? Where did you hide them? Was it a skill that activated after you broke those sticks?!”

What on earth was going on here?

It was as though the world itself was bending over backwards to help him out.

“What sort of magician would I be if I told you the secret of my tricks?”

“A trick?! A trick couldn’t have summoned Peroroncino-sama’s weapon!”

“...Well, that’s correct. Saying so is kind of disrespectful towards him. Simply put, I was using cash items. You should understand now, right? Everything you have done until now has been dancing in the palm of my hand.”

A fully charged orb of light streaked out at Shalltear. She knew it was useless, but she tried to block it with the Spuit Lance anyway — and then her surroundings were enveloped by a blast of exploding brilliance.

Shalltear tried to think as the sacred radiance scorched her entire body. Retreating was pointless, and if this went on, there was nothing she could do but let him slaughter her at his leisure.

That white armor had high defensive power, but it could not possibly be unscathed by a hit from the Spuit Lance. All she could do was count on her weapon's life-absorbing properties as she abandoned all defense and focused on an all-out attack.

"Uoooooh!"

Shalltear gave voice to a battlecry that did not suit her face. A cold, clear voice responded to her:

"The odds of victory are seven to three… I trust I need not say who is who?"

Ainz slowly raised an axe made of red crystal that shed a purple glow. It  was a menacing-looking greataxe. As she saw this, Shalltear hesitated on whether or not to advance, but in the end she took a step forward.

After all, there was nowhere for her to run.

"Such admirable determination. This is the endgame, Shalltear!"

♦♦♦

“...Ainz-sama. Will Win.”

Those words slipped out from Cocytus as he shook his head. However, Demiurge — who lacked a warrior’s knowledge — asked a question.

Naturally, Demiurge was firmly convinced that his master would win. However, he needed to know more about the situation to make a logical analysis, and so he voiced the doubt in his heart.

“Why is that? Should it not take a long time to determine victory?”

“Shalltear. Has. Abandoned. Defense. For. An. All-out. Attack. I. Would. Have. Done. So. In. The. Same. Situation.”

“Indeed. Ainz-sama changed his weapons one after the other — in other words, she has no idea what other weapons Ainz-sama possesses. Under these circumstances where she lacks further knowledge, Shalltear would conclude that running away is a foolish option after seeing Ainz-sama’s bow. Thus, all she can do is close the distance to the attack range of her Spuit Lance and fight. The fact that she can no longer use skills and magic only adds to that… at least, that is what I think.”

“I see. So that’s how it was. After all, only you could fully grasp the weapons which the Supreme Beings did not show to us, Cocytus.”

Cocytus shrugged.

“I. Only. Know. Of. Their. Effects. And. Names. But. I. Have. Not.

Seen. Them. Before."

"I see. I think I understand, though I am unclear on the details. In other words, now that Shalltear is committed to an attack, Ainz-sama has brought out the axe—"

"—Blood-Drinking. Flesh-Eater."

"Thank you, Cocytus. That Blood-Drinking Flesh-Eater does not look very balanced and seems inaccurate. However, it should be able to strike Shalltear, who has abandoned her defense."

"I. Mentioned. It. Before. But. The. Entire. Fight. Has. Gone. As. Ainz-sama. Planned. I. Am. In, Awe. Of. His. Prowess."

"Ainz-sama probably foresaw those developments. His insight is astounding, as expected of the one who gathered all the Supreme Beings… In all honesty, he could probably rule Nazarick easily without us. I am somewhat dissatisfied."

"...His. Extraordinary Ability. As. A. Magic. Caster… No. As. A. Combatant. Is. Truly. An. Inspiration."

"Still… the battle is not decided yet, no? Ainz-sama is still at a disadvantage compared to Shalltear, in terms of health."

Albedo simply smiled, because she was certain of Ainz's victory.

"There will be no problem on that account."

"Why is that?"

“That man is Ainz Ooal Gown, our ruler and supreme leader. Since he has declared he will seize victory, there is no doubt that he will attain it.”

♦♦♦

Every attack ate away at their health.

Shalltear’s attacks restored her health, but the damage Ainz dealt with every hit was enough to negate the health that Shalltear regained. The Spuit Lance chipped away at Ainz’s health, turning this into something like a game of chicken.

Every time that axe scored a hit on Shalltear, it felt as though it would chop her armor to bits. She felt bones breaking and flesh ripping throughout her body. However, whenever she thrust her lance, which dealt bludgeoning damage thanks to a skill, she could feel bone fragmenting under her assaults.

*This feeling… Can I win with this amount of health…?*

Joy filled Shalltear’s heart, as she felt that there was still a chance of victory. If they continued trading blows, that might just be the case.

After abandoning all thoughts of defense, Shalltear had thrown herself wholeheartedly into the attack, thinking only of seeing which of them would fall first. Shalltear, so full of anxiety, finally smiled as a light appeared in the darkness.

This was because she had been calculating the rate of her health’s depletion. The more she worried, the greater her joy would be.

“Ahahahaha!”

Shalltear laughed as she struck and was struck in turn.

“Ahahaha! Ainz-sama! It seems you’ll run out of health first! The difference in our health will be what determines victory and defeat!”

And then, something dumped cold water on Shalltear’s pride.

It was a simple sentence:

“...Do you really think so?”

Shalltear realised her foolishness as she heard the voice of the schemer who had run her ragged and who had controlled the progress of all the events which had unfolded thus far.

Impossible.

How did he intend to turn this situation around?

Shalltear did not know how he would do it, but a third person’s voice clarified her doubts.

“Time’s up — Momonga-oniichan!”

It was a girl’s voice.

She had never heard this voice before, which seemed to be that of a woman pretending to be a child. It reminded Shalltear of a female voice she had heard before. If that woman had pitched her voice differently, it would probably have sounded like this.

“Now, what do you think ‘Time’s up’ refers to?”

Engrossed in trading blows and mauling her foe with her weapon, Shalltear had no idea what that question meant. A look of bafflement appeared on her pretty face.

“If everything thus far has gone as I have planned, that means, the time which has passed has also been within my calculations. Now, what do you think that watch meant when it told us that time was up?”

The axe in Ainz’s hands vanished, becoming a pure white shield. With his matching white shield and armor, Ainz resembled a paladin of pure white.

The shield rang crisply as it deflected the Spuit Lance’s attack.

Things being as they were, Ainz had probably turned to defense because of that female voice, but Shalltear had no idea of the reason for that. As he went on the defensive, Ainz’s voice reached her ears amidst the clashing of metal.

“Do I even need to say it? The battle is over, and victory has been decided.”

*Why?* Shalltear was still at 25% health. *How has victory been decided,* Shalltear wanted to scream, but she could not.

“...Super-tier magic cannot kill you in one hit when you’re at full health. Then, all I need to do is reduce your health until it can do so. And it would seem our back and forth just now has heavily depleted your health.”

“...Ahhh, ah,  ahhhhhhhh—”

Shalltear desperately attacked, trying to shut her opponent up and block out the knowledge of her impending defeat.

The clashes of metal against metal rang out continuously, the interval between them less than a tenth of a second. Shalltear’s continuous attacks lashed at Ainz like a storm.

However, Ainz neatly blocked them, with unimaginable speed. So skilful was he that it seemed that he could stand beneath a great waterfall and not get wet. As he effortlessly blocked the attacks against him, he continued:

“...It’s true that I am inferior in terms  of pure fighting ability… but my magical defense is superior. Then — you should understand what I’m getting at, right? I’m about to make my move, Shalltear. All you can do is pray that I miscalculated.”

“Kuuuuuuuhhhhh—!”

♦♦♦

Knowing that defeat was at hand, Shalltear continued her frenzied string of attacks. Though her features were distorted, her looks were not diminished.

In the face of that, Ainz made his final gambit.

Despite what he had told Shalltear, his plan had not gone as smoothly as he had intended.

To begin with, super-tier magic was like a skill, and did not consume MP. However, it was still a form of magic, and he could not access it when transformed into a warrior.

Once he dispelled the warrior transformation magic, he would not be able to equip his armor and shield and they would fall off him. That would make it very difficult for him to resist Shalltear's attacks. If she decided to use a skill of some sort, he might not be able to secure a victory through HP damage with super-tier magic.

That would spell defeat for him.

However, he had no other way to win.

Ainz briefly went over the timing of his actions. First, he would dispel the warrior transformation, and then he would use a cash item.

He smiled.

He had never been this profligate in the use of cash items, even when PVPing in YGGDRASIL. This was the difference between a game and reality — between entertainment and survival.

*Now!*

He blocked Shalltear's full-tilt attack with his friend's shield, and then he glared at her.

He dispelled the warrior transformation, and cast the super-tier spell.

The same magic circle appeared around him as before, and he prepared to break the hourglass-like cash item—

—And then he suddenly hesitated.

This was because a wave of guilt flooded through him; guilt at murdering an NPC which his friend had painstakingly created.

His hesitation was a fatal mistake.

Shalltear did not miss that opening. She noticed the item in Ainz’s hand and thrust her Spuit Lance, enhanced with a skill. Her plan was to destroy Ainz’s hand.

Having dispelled his warrior transformation, Ainz could not possibly avoid Shalltear’s attack—

♦♦♦

—And then she felt something.

Just as the Spuit Lance was about to destroy the item, she felt something on her spine. That was clearly hostility.

Someone hostile had appeared beside Shalltear, so obviously that she could not ignore it.

Shalltear averted her eyes from Ainz to see who that enemy was.

And then — she found that there was nobody there.

Ainz’s spell had created a 200 meter-wide expanse of desert.

Nobody else was there beside Shalltear and Ainz. The hostility she had felt just now was nowhere to be found, as though she had been daydreaming—

“Not good!” Shalltear exclaimed as she came to her senses, but by then it was already too late.

The hourglass shattered, reducing the casting time of the spell to zero.

“[Fallen Down].”

With those words, a brilliant flash erupted between them and swallowed up everything.

Shalltear could feel her body disintegrating in the incredible heat.

Her carbonized right arm crumbled to dust, while the Spuit Lance slowly fell to what was probably the ground in this bleached-white world. Her face was shrivelled up from the incoming heat, and all she could see before her was whiteness.

Her throat was dried up too — in fact, she did not know if her throat had also been incinerated — so it was difficult to speak. Still, there was one thing she had to say. Shalltear Bloodfallen marshalled the last reserves of her vitality to give praise:

“...Ah, long live Ainz Ooal Gown-sama. Truly, you are the mightiest of Nazarick’s Supreme Beings.”

This was her sincere respect for the almighty one who had gathered the 41 Supreme Beings. The heatwave seemed to burn away her bindings, and though her body could not move, she felt unimaginably free.

Someone who should not have been there appeared in Shalltear’s vanishing consciousness. That someone was the person that had allowed this victory to take place.

The undead could ignore just about any form of mind-affecting effect. However, there were certain abilities that produced similar effects, but which were not counted as mind-affecting. That person had used such an ability.

Shalltear smiled, and said:

“...Shorty.”

Thus satisfied, Shalltear vanished into a world of white.

♦♦♦

Aura dispelled her skill [Sky Eye], and her puckered pink lips returned to their original shape. There was a look of annoyance on her face as she began scolding someone who was not there.

“You dummy… how could you let yourself get mind-controlled, even though you were undead? That’s just so stupid of you.”

“What, what’s wrong, onee-chan?”

“Hm? Nothing.”

Mare looked where Aura had been looking, but since he was deep in the forest, all he could see in any direction was trees. Still, he could tell what Aura was looking at from the way she was facing.

She should have been observing the battle between Shalltear and her master.

His big sister Aura could use a ranger skill to expand her field of vision to about two kilometers. This was why he and his sister were standing watch over the surroundings with the help of the Eyeball Corpses.

“Th-then, has the battle been decided?”

“Mm. Ainz-sama won, hands down.”

“That, that’s what I thought too.”

The form of Ainz-sama — a being that not even the strongest Guardian could defeat — appeared in Mare’s mind. It was a sensible conclusion; how could the one who led the Supreme Beings be defeated?

“Then, onee-chan, should, should we go collect Shalltear’s equipment?”

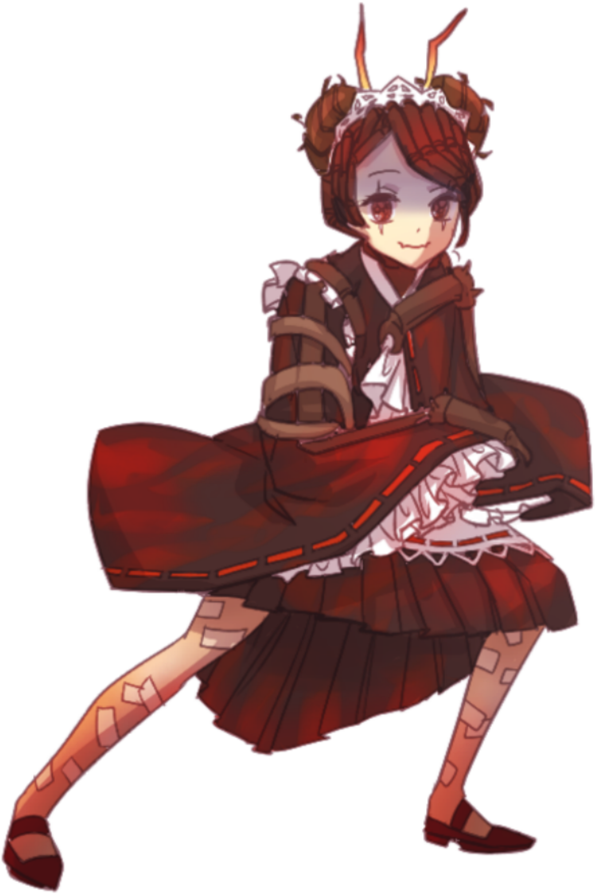
Aura considered what she had seen before terminating her skill.

“Ainz-sama should have recovered it all. We’ll fall back as instructed.”

“Mm.”

Mare knew his sister was in a bad mood, so he said nothing else, but obediently acknowledged her commands.

Aura’s best friend had been mind-controlled, and made to point her lance at the beloved master to whom they had all sworn their loyalty. While her execution was the expected outcome of such a course of action, she still felt upset about it.



**Part 4**

He opened the name list in the Throne Room, and as expected, the space which should have contained Shalltear's name was blank. This verified that Shalltear was dead, and so phase one of the plan was concluded.

Ainz's heart ached. While he knew that there was no other way, the fact that he had personally committed and witnessed the act filled him with guilt.

In his heart, Ainz apologized to Shalltear. Then he gulped, and turned to the gathered Guardians.

"Then, the next step will be to resurrect Shalltear. Albedo, pay attention to Shalltear's name. If she remains mind-controlled as before..."

"Ainz-sama, though I may overstep myself, I propose that you should allow us to deal with it ourselves."

Cocytus and Aura immediately agreed with Demiurge's words, while Mare despondently agreed as well. Only Albedo remained unmoved.

"Demiurge…"

Demiurge's passionate words interrupted Ainz's mumbling.

"We are fully aware that your orders are to be respected above all else, Ainz-sama. We will grind ourselves to dust in order to obey them. However, as your loyal servants, we cannot allow you to be placed into danger once more, Ainz-sama."

Demiurge’s gaze shifted from Ainz to Albedo.

“If Shalltear betrays you once more, then we shall eliminate her as your Guardians. We pray that you will watch us do so, Ainz-sama.”

Now that he understood the Guardians’ intentions, Ainz could not offer any further resistance.

“I understand. Guardians, if Shalltear betrays us once more, you may deal with her as you see fit.”

The Guardians nodded in acknowledgement.

Ainz felt miserable as he watched them.

What a pathetic excuse for a master he was.

Even after going this far, he still had to let his beloved children kill each other.

The root cause of it all was his foolishness. It was all his fault.

Ainz wanted to sigh, but as he saw the gentle expression on Albedo’s face as she stood to the side, he decided to swallow it.

“Ainz-sama, all you need to do is stand aside and watch. To whom should we pledge our loyalty if the final Supreme Being vanishes? Though we will not have been abandoned, we will still be lonely if all the Supreme Beings are gone.”

“...Indeed. It’s very lonely to not have anyone by your side.”

Ainz’s eyes had unconsciously turned to the the flags hanging within the Throne Room, his gaze resting on the emblems above his head.

“...Yes, you’re right… It must have been that way in the Treasury too… What a fool I was.”

After muttering to himself, Ainz turned to face the Guardians.

“Protect me, Guardians. It begins now!”

Their spirited replies washed over Ainz as he grabbed the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown that floated in the air beside him, and turned it toward a corner of the Throne Room.

There was a mountain of gold coins there, about 500 million of them. That was the sum needed to recall Shalltear to life.

Normally, he would have needed to use the keyboard to perform the necessary operations, but he now knew that it was no longer necessary.

The mountain of gold changed shape, from a solid to a liquid.

Watched by the Guardians, the molten gold formed a river, which flowed to the same place. Ten thousand tons of gold compacted and shrank, taking a humanoid shape that finally resolved itself into the form of a golden puppet, and its golden glow slowly weakened.

Soon, the golden glow had vanished completely, leaving white, waxy skin and platinum blonde hair. There was no doubt that the person before him was Shalltear Bloodfallen.

“Albedo!”

Ainz kept his eyes fixed on Shalltear as he bellowed Albedo’s name.

“Please be at ease. It seems the mind control has been terminated.”

“Is that so…”

Ainz unconsciously touched his chest in response to the powerful sense of relief flooding him. The gesture calmed his spirit. Then, he reached into his pocket dimension and retrieved a black cloak, before he strode over to the supine Shalltear.

Her eyes were tightly shut, and her chest was not moving. She lay quietly on the ground, like a corpse. Still, the undead were essentially animated corpses, so that was hardly unusual.

*Something unusual—*

The chest he had just seen was so flat that it hardly seemed to belong to a girl, but to a boy. Not knowing where to put his eyes, Ainz’s gaze left her chest and looked elsewhere.

The freshly resurrected Shalltear was naked (of course), so he had no idea where he should be looking. Ainz was so panicked that he forgot that all he had to do was look elsewhere.

His vision had sharpened greatly from when he was a human being, so he could see certain places very clearly.

Shalltear’s body was carelessly displayed, and her thighs were slightly parted—

—Ainz hurriedly threw the black cape over her.

The cape spread in mid-air, settling perfectly on Shalltear and covering her entire body.

*It's not like I regret doing that! I'm undead, so I have no sexual desires! No, that should be,* almost *no sexual desires. I was looking at Shalltear's body because I was simply curious about whether or not she was designed with parts under her clothing. You'd never be able to take off all your clothes in YGGDRASIL anyway, so that's why I took a peek. That's right, it's not because I was wondering if she had hair down there or anything!*

As Ainz tried to explain his actions to… someone, he approached Shalltear, feeling somewhat helpless. Perhaps the reason why he took so long to reach her was because he wanted to cool down his overheating head.

Also, he deliberately ignored the female voice behind him saying, "If you are interested, I have no objection to displaying myself for your viewing pleasure."

As Ainz stood before her, Shalltear's crimson eyes opened, as though sensing the presence of someone nearby. She blinked sleepily and looked around, finally resting her gaze on Ainz.

"Ainz-sama?"

She sounded like she was groggy from having just woken up. However, he could hear the loyalty in her voice. Although Albedo and Nazarick's administration system had already verified her allegiance, Ainz was delighted to confirm it with his own ears, and he knelt down to embrace Shalltear.

“Uh, ueeh?”

It was hard to believe that such a slender body possessed such startling physical abilities.

Ainz paid no heed to Shalltear, who was babbling in a thoroughly baffled way, and tightened his grip on her.

“Wonderful… no, I’m sorry. This was all my fault…”

“Eh? Ah, I’m not sure what happened, but I’m certain that you couldn’t have made a mistake, Ainz-sama.”

Shalltear’s ice-cold hands returned the embrace. They were vaguely uncomfortable, given that she seemed to be trying to grope him, but Ainz did not stop her, because she was probably trying to verify her sense of touch after her resurrection. He pretended that he did not hear her saying, “Ah, shall have my first time here…”

However, Albedo immediately made her displeasure known.

“...Ainz-sama, I believe Shalltear is tired, so we should leave her be for now.”

“Indeed.”

Perhaps there was a penalty for resurrecting NPCs, just as there was for players. After all, this was the first resurrection ever since coming to this world.

“Tell me the details later. Before that, I have some questions.”

After Ainz let go of Shalltear, a look of disappointment crossed Shalltear’s face and she glared sharply at Albedo. Albedo responded with her usual smile. He thought they would continue staring at each other as usual, but Shalltear averted her eyes instead.

“Yes, do ask me whatever you desire… right, Ainz-sama, why am I in the Throne Room? Then, there’s the matter of my body, and your treatment of me, Ainz-sama. Have I caused any trouble?”

“I was about to ask you that. Do you remember anything that happened?”

“Ah, yes.”

“...Sorry. Shalltear, tell me the last thing you remember.”

Shalltear’s most recent memory was five days ago. She had no impression of what had happened after that, until now.

Ainz could have used the 10th-tier spell [Control Amnesia] like he had at Carne Village, but even altering short stretches of memory would require a massive amount of MP. The staggering amount of MP needed to affect five days’ worth of memories was beyond the limit of ordinary magic casters. Not even Ainz and his extraordinary MP regeneration rates could do it.

Of course,  the resurrection process might be such that NPCs lost their memories of the past few days. Alternately, perhaps several people might have gathered to do it.

He lacked information at the present moment, so he could not solve that mystery.

Still, he could be sure that whoever had used the World-Class Item on Shalltear had gone silent, vanishing without a trace.

*It's quite troublesome when I don't know who's acting behind the scenes. The enemy might be waiting for a chance to strike at Nazarick… no, perhaps I should be glad that this incident didn't escalate… In any case, I'll make sure I thoroughly avenge myself on whoever did this to Nazarick.*

Ainz quelled the anger which even his undead traits could not fully suppress, and gently asked Shalltear:

"Are there any other problems with your body?"

If this world was like YGGDRASIL, then there should not have been anything else. The NPCs should not have lost levels, but he was unsure if the same applied to this world as well. For all he knew, the NPCs would lose levels, just like player characters would.

Ainz felt herself up before answering Ainz:

"I don't think there's anything."

"Is that so."

After Shalltear answered, a look of shock came over her face. Not knowing what was wrong, Ainz felt uneasiness welling up inside him.

“Ainz-sama!”

“What happened?! What’s wrong?”

“My chest is gone.”

The faces of the Guardians twisted as they heard this, with expressions of “We want our concern back” written all over them. Even Demiurge had his teeth bared.

“Don’t you know what you did? How could you say something like that?!”

As Albedo delivered a rebuke on everyone’s behalf, Shalltear’s shoulders trembled in fright.

Ainz had gone so limp that his hands were about to drag on the floor. All he could do was watch Shalltear argue with the other Guardians, and ponder various questions about resurrection.

In particularly, he hoped that Clementine and Khazit, who he had met in the graveyard, would also lose their memories after resurrection, as Shalltear had.

Still, that was just being optimistic.

Since he did not know why Shalltear had lost her memories, he could not guarantee that their resurrection through magic would be the same as resurrecting an NPC through money.

Just as Ainz was thinking about these things, Shalltear had already begun tearing up under Albedo’s one-sided torrent of abuse.

As Ainz watched the scene before him, he recalled a scene from the past.

♦♦♦

He saw Bukubukuchagama (the elder sister) scolding Peroroncino (her younger brother), and the rest of his smiling guildmates.

The NPCs before him were like his past comrades.

♦♦♦

Ainz slowly reached a hand out, and then stopped in mid-air. It felt as though an invisible wall of glass was blocking him.

A profound sense of loneliness filled Ainz's heart.

It felt as though the memories of the warm place where the Guardians existed was little more than an image on a monitor — and he was on the other side.

If he stepped into it, they would pledge their loyalty to him. That was a form of awe, and not the warmth he had felt when he had been with his friends.

He felt that it was a terrible shame.

Just as Ainz's hand fell powerlessly, Albedo turned around — as though sensing something strange about Ainz — and watched him quietly. Baffled by why she was looking at him that way, Ainz was about to ask what was wrong when the flames in his eyes suddenly flared up.

That was because Albedo was gently holding her hand out to him. After a moment's hesitation, Ainz took her hand, and thus he was pulled into the circle of the Guardians.

Albedo was the first to speak, and then the other Guardians followed suit.

"Ainz-sama, please reprimand Shalltear sternly."

"That's right! Please give this dummy a good scolding!"

"Indeed. She. Needs. A. Stern. Lesson."

"You'll remember Ainz-sama's words of wisdom, won't you?"

"Al-although, maybe it would be better not to be too strict... er, erm…"

"—Ha, hahaha."

Ainz could not keep his laughter from escaping his mouth despite the baffled looks from the Guardians around him. No, that laughter did not just come from his mouth, but from his heart.

After he was satisfied, Ainz silently turned back to Shalltear.

"I have told Albedo before, but the fault for this does not lie with you, Shalltear. It is I — who possessed all this information but did not consider the possibility of this happening — who most deserves to be rebuked for this. Shalltear, you did nothing wrong. Remember that.”

“Thank, thank you, Ainz-sama!”

“Demiurge, you will be in charge of explaining what happened to Shalltear. Can you do that?”

Demiurge bowed to show that he understood.

“Ah, then there’s the matter of Sebas—”

“He will be bait.”

As Ainz calmly proposed using one of his subordinates as bait, the Guardians merely nodded, with the attitude a proper minion should have. They were simply prioritizing the considerations of the master of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick over the life of their colleague.

“I am not entirely willing to do this, but it cannot be helped… I do not know why Shalltear was targeted, but if the opposition is looking for a new victim, they might well decide on Sebas, who was travelling with her. This was why I did not call him back to receive a World-Class Item… Albedo, select a few clandestine operatives to keep an eye on Sebas and his surroundings… He might be bait, but I do not intend to allow Sebas to be so easily taken. Inform these observers that their mission also includes preventing the enemy from approaching Sebas.”

After issuing his orders, Ainz narrowed his eyes — in other words, the flames in his eye sockets grew dim.

*...Someday I shall meet the person who used a World-Class Item on Shalltear. When that day comes, I shall return the favor with interest!*

“Understood. I will select the appropriate personnel as soon as possible.”

“Please do. Thanks to Shalltear, we now know that NPCs can be resurrected, but I do not wish to kill any of the NPCs my friends created again.”

Moved by those words, the Guardians lowered their heads. They had probably sensed how much Ainz valued them. However, since he had actually voiced those feelings, the effect on them had been that much greater.

Shalltear seemed to have realized something had happened to her. A look of shock crossed her face, which soon turned into one of utmost regret.

Ainz gestured that she did not need to take it to heart. Just then, a voice came from the side.

“Ah, then, Ainz-sama.”

“What is it, Mare?”

“Erm, ah, should... should I remove all traces of the battle?”

“There’s no need for that. Did you know? When one breaks a spell-sealing crystal, it releases powerful energy, enough to level the surroundings.”

“Eh? Is, is that so?”

“...My apologies. It’s a lie, of course. What is false is true and what is true is false. Magic-sealing crystals seem to be rare items, so nobody should be able to test that. Albedo, put a few scratches on the item Nigun was using. Then, we’ll need to have the blacksmith build some damaged armor and put some scorch marks on it, so it looks like it went through an intense battle.”

“Understood.”

“In addition, perhaps I have been too careless so far, which allowed hidden enemies around Nazarick to harm us. Thus, I wish to initiate a program to strengthen Nazarick. Part of that is to use my skills to create an undead army. I think I’ve mentioned that before… hm? Did I only tell Albedo about that? Forget that. In any case, this will be my top priority. I would like to make some preparations to recover corpses from E-Rantel which can be used to make an undead army.”

“About that, Ainz-sama…”

“What’s wrong, Albedo?”

“If I am not wrong, when you use a human corpse as a medium for making undead, the undead thus created are quite weak, despite being mid-tier. Is that correct?”

“Indeed. Is there a problem?”

The most powerful undead he could make with the corpses of the Sunlight Scripture were level 40. Beyond that, the undead would vanish with the passage of time, along with the corpses that served as their medium.

“In truth, after receiving that order, I had considered ways of obtaining fresh corpses. Perhaps you could consider using non human corpses?”

“...I trust you do not intend to use the corpses of Nazarick’s vassals?”

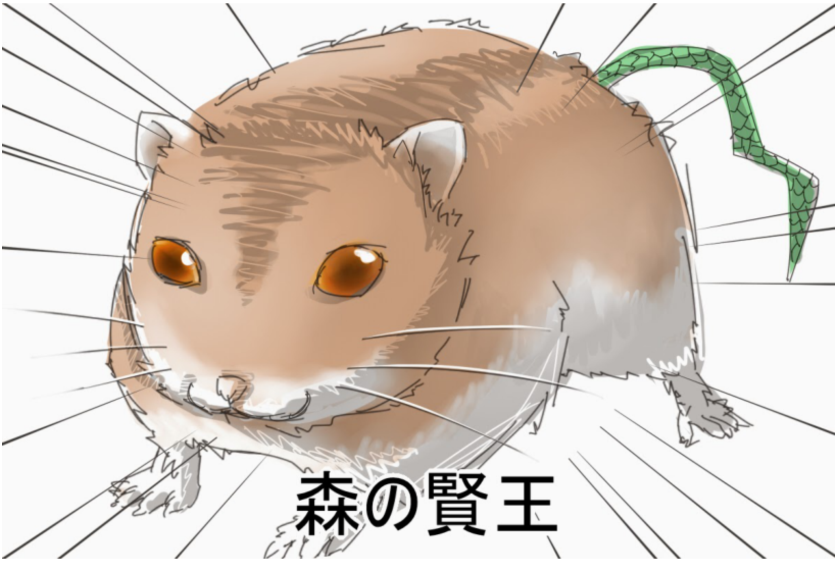
“No, that is absolutely not my intention. I was thinking of using other demihumans.”

Albedo smiled. It was a stunningly beautiful — and terribly cruel — smile.

“Aura discovered a Lizardman village. What do you think of attacking and destroying them?”

# Overlord Volume 3 Epilogue

## Epilogue



*Translator: Nigel*

*Editor/Proofreader: JcqC*

Perote, the leader of the mithril-ranked adventurer team “Tenrou”, opened the doors to the Adventurer’s Guild.

The adventurers there looked at him with admiring eyes.
Perote was used to this sort of thing. However, the reception seemed more subdued that it had been a month ago.

*Well, it can’t be helped.*

He turned his eyes to the noticeboard. Regretfully, there were almost no mithril-ranked requests.

Granted, jobs which only mithril-ranked adventurers could do were quite rare. However, the reason for this dearth of requests was not because there were few of them to begin with, but because there was an adventurer who could swiftly tackle requests of mithril rank and up.

“...Momon-san, huh.”

Perote sounded like he was complaining when he said that name.

About a month ago, that man had slain a powerful Vampire.

He had not personally witnessed that intense battle, but one could imagine what had happened after seeing the remains of that battlefield. Thus, he had not been surprised to learn that Kralgra — an adventurer team of the same rank as Perote’s own — had been annihilated in the crossfire.

No, anyone who joined that battle would have been killed for certain.

The exploding magic crystal had scorched the land black, and it had even reduced some places to a desert. The startling thing was that it had to be done to defeat that Vampire. And then—

"—They survived…"

Not only had they survived, but they had seized victory. It was only natural for Perote to consider these people — who had returned safely from a battle with a Vampire, a monster that Perote himself could not defeat — to be even greater monsters.

The change in his tone from just now was because Momon was powerful enough to compel respect from him.

Just as he was fantasizing about that sort of absolute might, he heard the sound of the door opening. A wave of commotion swept through the guild like a gust of wind.

Perote vaguely understood the reason for that disturbance, and turned his eyes in the same reaction as everyone was looking. There, he saw the person he had been expecting.

It was the talk of the town, the "Dark Hero", Momon.

He had two greatswords on his back, and a beautiful girl behind him.

"There's a lot of adamantite on the front of his armor… how much did it cost, anyway?"

The nickname of "Dark Hero" came from that suit of incredibly high-end full plate armor, which had been heavily damaged when he came back from that battlefield. Back then, there had been scorch and claw marks everywhere, but now that suit of armor was pristine. It glittered brightly under the rays of the sun.

This was the result of the combined efforts of every magic caster in the Magician’s Guild coming together to repair it.

At his neck hung a metal plate — one that belonged to a living legend, an object of worship for adventurers, the trump card of humanity that would protect them from being ravaged by the powerful races of the world — an adamantite plate.

His accomplishments had long surpassed those of the orichalcum rank, and there had never been one of those in E-Rantel before.

And now, this individual, famed in song and story, had appeared before them, stirring the Adventurer’s Guild into a frenzy.

“The Kingdom’s third adamantite adventurer team…”

“That must be… the ‘Dark Hero’ Momon, right? ...And behind him is the ‘Beautiful Princess’, Nabe. The rumors were right about her looks...”

“You know, they say he was responsible for burning down that swath of forest… apparently, he did it with some kind of martial art...”

“No way, how could that be… if he could use martial arts to burn it down, wouldn’t that mean he’s no longer human?”

“He should be one of the few people who could do it, right? Adamantite-ranked adventurers are those who define the peak of power. I wouldn’t be surprised if people called him the adamantite-rank of adamantite-ranks.”

Momon advanced calmly to the counter under these adoring looks. The adventurers chatting with the guild receptionists all made way for the most highly-placed of adventurers, and on their faces was respect — and fear.

Momon nonchalantly addressed the receptionist.

“Our assignment is complete. Please help us keep an eye out for any new jobs.”

The guild receptionist’s eyes went wide, but they returned to their normal shape immediately. Perote knew why her eyes had widened. The task Momon had accepted was one which even mithril-ranked adventurers would have trouble accomplishing, and which would need quite a while to complete. However, Momon and his partner had cleared it with ease.

Indeed, he could clear even mithril-ranked missions with ease.

This was only to be expected, because such were the talents of the most highly-ranked adventurers.

“There’s no work left for us.”

Perote let that grumble slip, but of course, he did not actually mean it. Anyone who could reach the mithril rank would have made enough money to retire and live in luxury for the rest of their lives. Thus, anyone who continued adventuring after this must have had a reason for that beyond money.

“Ah, Momon-sama. I am very sorry, but we do not have any other jobs for you, Momon-sama. Please forgive us.”

The receptionist rose to her feet and bowed deeply to him.

“Is that so—”

Momon seemed about to say something else, but then he froze halfway. Several seconds later, he spoke again:

“—I see. That’s good, because I just remembered something I had to do. I’ll be returning to the inn; if there’s anything, look for me there. Do you know where I’m staying?”

“I do. Is it the Shining Gold Pavilion?”

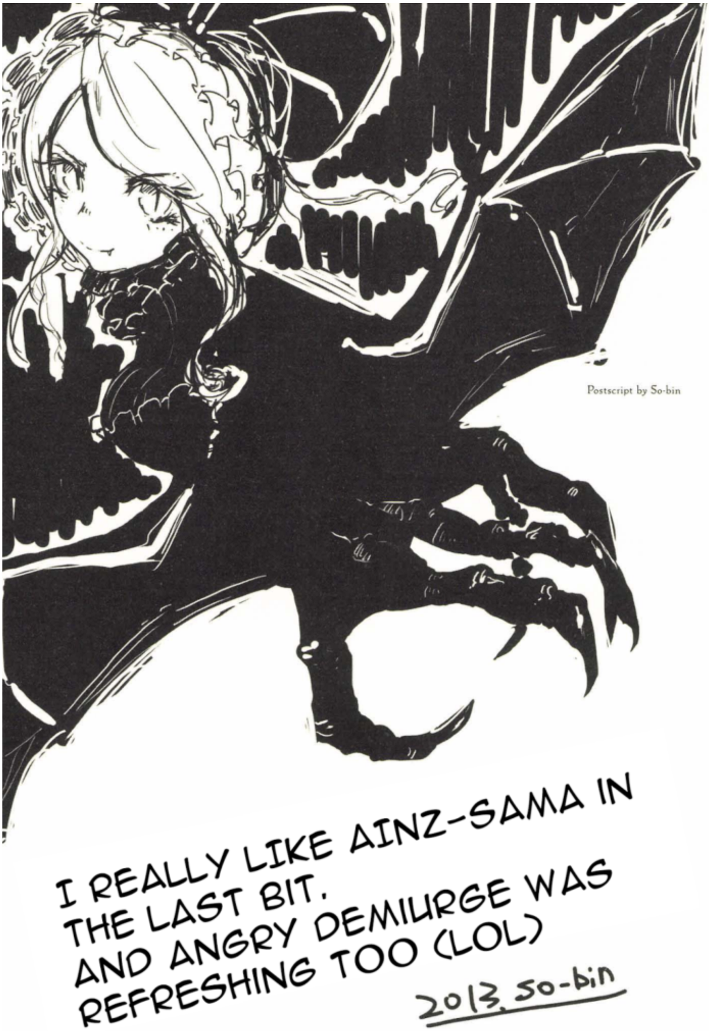
Ainz nodded, then flourished his crimson cape as he turned and walked away.

Perote had heard the sound of Momon speaking from his side, but because his voice was too soft, Perote could not make out the details.

What Perote had failed to hear was Ainz’s order to his distant subordinates to demonstrate their matchless military might.

“Order Gargantua to move out, and summon Victim as well. Once Cocytus returns, we will bear witness to a rare event — all the Floor Guardians will move out as one.”

# Overlord Volume 3 Afterword



Postscript by So-bin

I REALLY LIKE AINZ-SAMA IN THE LAST BIT.
AND ANGRY DEMIURGE WAS REFRESHING TOO (LOL)
2013, SO-bin

It’s been about four months since the previous volume, and I’m glad I could speak with everyone again. I am the author, Maruyama Kugane.

How did everyone find “Overlord 3 - The Bloody Valkyrie”? I would be glad if you enjoyed it.

Still, how shall I continue writing from now on? That same question comes up every time. My experiences are largely limited to the company and my home, so I'm not confident of writing anything interesting. Thus, I shall disclose my schedule for the past four months.

First, I spent about a month writing the manuscript, then hand it to the editor-sama for checking. Then the corrected manuscript will come back to me for further changes. This process takes about a month to complete.

The manuscript then goes to Proofreader-san, who bullies me~ But after his feedback and my corrections to the manuscript, which lasts about one and a half months, the work is finally complete.

In this way, it took a total of about three months or so to write "The Bloody Valkyrie".

There's about a month of free time between the completion of the manuscript and publishing. I divide this time by four and spend it updating the WN version every month.

My work at my company is very relaxed, so I can come home early. I could actually force myself to proofread too, but people who need to come back late every night end up sleeping less, so they won't even get that month of free time. It's rough for them.

...Although, how on earth do those authors put out a new book every three months? Someone, please teach me how they do it.

Then, I shall express my thanks next.

Thank you very much to so-bin-sama, the people of Chord Design Studio, Ohaku-sama and F-da-sama. Without your support, this work would not have been possible.

Honey, thanks for your feedback. I changed it immediately.

And also, to all those of you who bought this book, thank you very much. If you have any opinions or feedback, you can use a postcard (you’ll need to pay postage yourself, sorry about that), or you can just write on the website if you’re a WN reader. I will be very grateful.

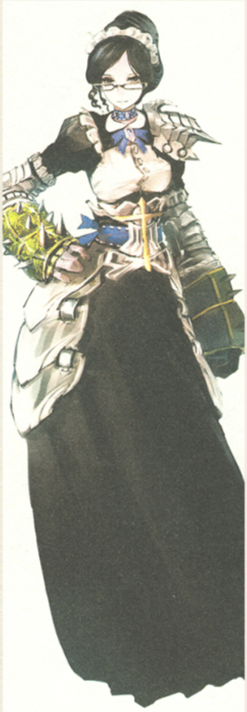
After that, the next volume… it’ll be solely focused on the Lizardmen. Nothing would delight me more than to receive your continued support!

See you around,

2013/3

Maruyama Kugane

Character 9



ユリ・アルファ | Heteromorphic Race

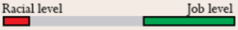
yuri・α

# BIG SISTER OF THE BATTLE MAIDS

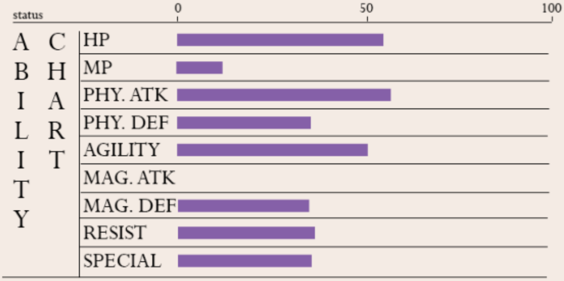
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Job | Great Tomb of Nazarick<br>Battle Maid | |
| Residence | One of the servant rooms in floor 9 | |
| Alignment | Good | Sense of Justice: 150 |
| Racial Level | Zombie | 10 lv |
| | Dullahan | 1 lv |
| Job Level | Striker | 10 lv |
| | Singale Brawler | 5 lv |
| | Cook | 1 lv |
| | Others | |

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 51 level

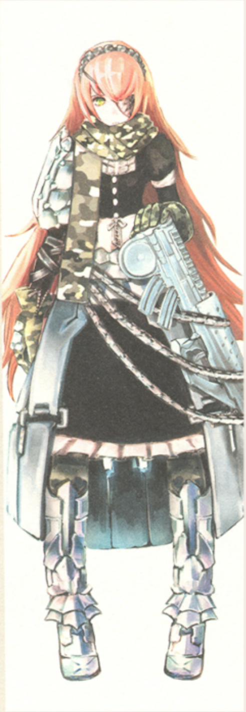
Racial level Job level



Total 11 level Total 40 level



Character 10



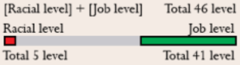
# シーゼット ニイチニハチ・デルタ

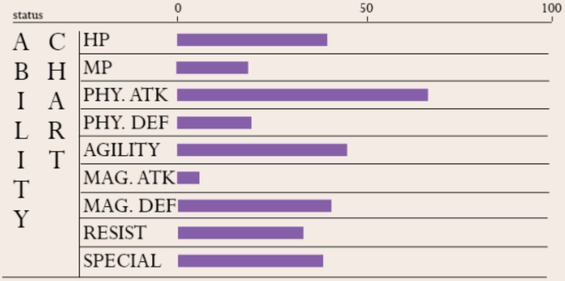
Heteromorphic Race

CZ2128・Δ

## SNEAK ATTACK MAID

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Job | Great Tomb of Nazarick<br>Battle Maid | |
| Residence | One of the servant rooms in floor 9 | |
| Alignment | Neutral ~Good | Sense of Justice: 100 |
| Racial Level | Automaton | 5 lv |
| Job Level | Gunner | 10 lv |
| | Sniper | 3 lv |
| | Assassin | 3 lv |
| | Stalker | 3 lv |
| | Others | |





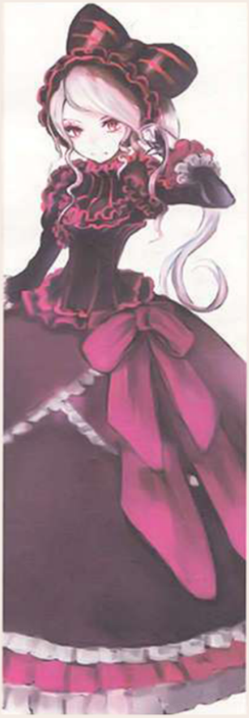
Character 11

# シャルティア・ブラッドフォールン

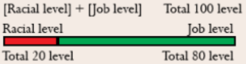
Heteromorphic Race

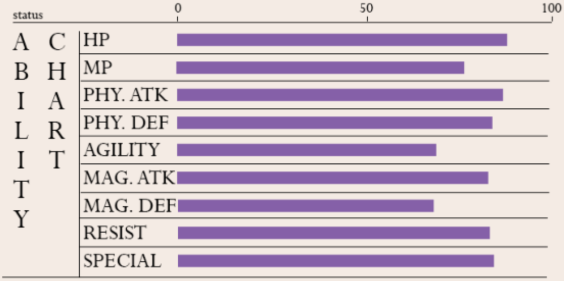
shalltear bloodfallen

## THE BLOODY VALKYRIE



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Job | Great Tomb of Nazarick<br>1st ~ 3rd Floor Guardian | |
| Residence | 2nd Floor Burial Chambers | |
| Alignment | Great~Extreme Evil | Sense of Justice: -450 |
| Racial Level | Vampire | 10 lv |
| | True Vampire | 10 lv |
| Job Level | Valkyrie / Lance | 5 lv |
| | Cursed Knight | 5 lv |
| | Cleric | 10 lv |
| | Others | |



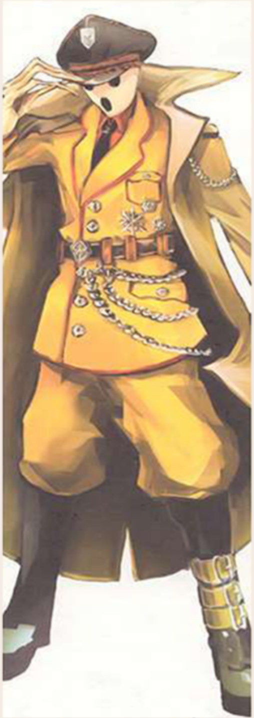


Character 12

# パンドラズ・

Heteromorphic Race

Character 12



# パンドラズ・アクター

Heteromorphic Race

pandora's actor

## EVER CHANGING MAN WITHOUT A FACE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Job | Great Tomb of Nazarick Treasury Zone Guardian | |
| Residence | Treasury Zone Manager Office | |
| Alignment | Neutral | Sense of Justice: -50 |
| Racial Level | Doppelganger | 15 lv |
| | Greater Doppelganger | 10 lv |
| Job Level | Expert | 10 lv |
| | Craftsman | 10 lv |
| | Lord of the Castle | 15 lv |
| | Others | |